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FORTEAN TIMES 432

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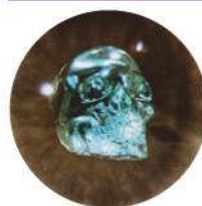
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A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Cattle mutilations, Bunny Man, starvation cult, fish hackers, puffa Pope and more...

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In 1985, Arthur C Clarke was back in our living rooms with a follow-up to his *Mysterious World* series, this time focusing on such wild talents as premonitions, telepathy and stigmata. **RYAN SHIRLOW** embarks on a three-part reassessment of a fortean TV classic.

40 THE LEGEND OF BLOODY MARY

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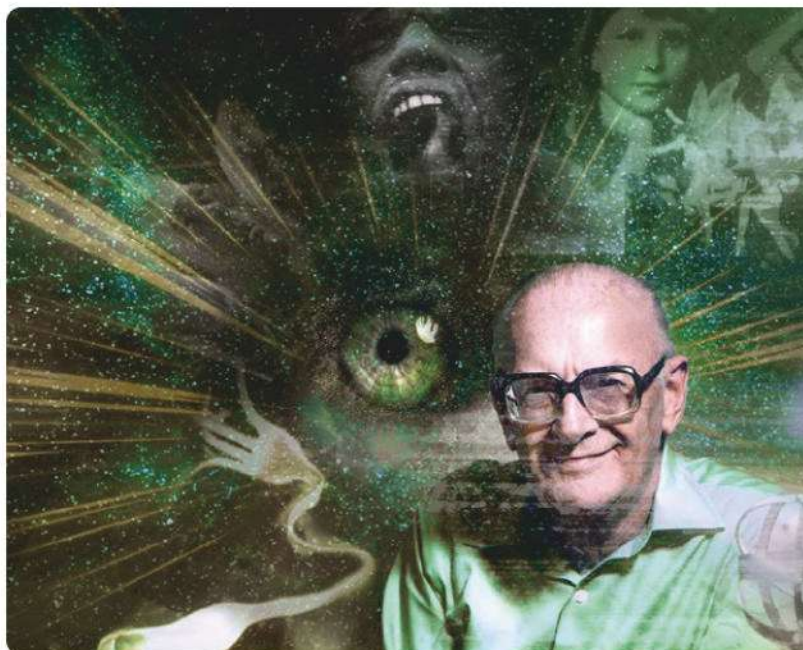
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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



WHAT ARTHUR DID NEXT

Welcome to our June issue, in which we kick off a three-part retrospective of a classic fortan television series. Regular readers will recall that in 2021 Ryan Shirlow took a deep dive into *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World*, the 1980 series that introduced a generation of TV viewers to a wide range of fortan topics, from entombed toads and dinosaur survivals to mysterious falls and UFOs. In 1985, Clarke was back with another series, this time focusing more on the human and esoteric dimensions of fortana: mind-over-matter, ghosts and poltergeists, stigmatics and fire-walkers, dowsing and telepathy. *Arthur C Clarke's World of Strange Powers* was a worthy follow-up to *Mysterious World*, serving up some serious weirdness (including "a now unthinkable teatime gorefest that showcased the wounds of Christ") for budding fortans and fascinated viewers. Over the next three issues Ryan will be revisiting each episode in detail and assessing how the cases Clarke and company presented in 1985 stack up today: so stay tuned for further instalments.

Elsewhere in this issue we look at the confluence of history, hauntings and urban legends as Rebecca Batley details the history of 'Bloody Mary' and Alan Murdie explores a stately home where her phantom is said to walk; and we shouldn't forget the Bunny Man of Clifton Bridge, Virginia, a rabbit-suited, axe-wielding Seventies psychopath and his even stranger contemporary avatars.

Meanwhile, Richard Freeman carries on up the jungle in search of Sumatra's elusive orang pendek and its even more elusive cousin the orang kardil. And if you need a further fix of cryptozoological capers, order a copy of the new FT bookazine *Monster Hunters: In Search of Unknown Animals* – see p.49 for details.

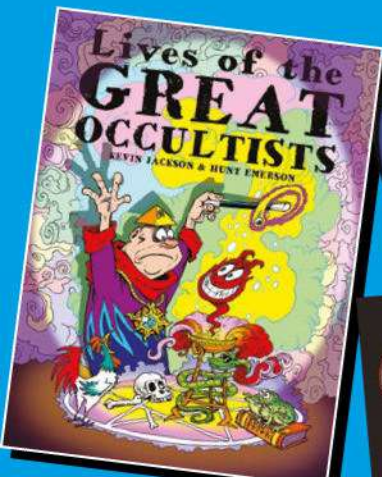
CELEBRATING JOHN MICHELL

The Fifth John Michell Symposium: Earth Spirit & Cosmic Pilgrim will take place from 10am to 5pm on Saturday 10 June at Temenos Academy at the Art Workers' Guild in Bloomsbury, London. The line-up of speakers includes Ronald Hutton, Cheryl Straffon, Guy Hayward, Tome Bree and Adam Tetlow. Tickets are available (£55/£25 concessions) from temenosacademy@myfastmail.com or by telephone: 07513 883 335. Further information at www.temenosacademy.com

ERRATA

FT427:52: Mark Greener's review of Stig Frøland's book *Duel Without End: Mankind's Battle With Microbes* awarded the book four stars, but this should, Mark says, have been five.

FT430:26: The date of Kai Roberts's death was given as 10 Dec 2023; obviously, it should have been 10 Dec 2022. Kai was a man of many talents, but time travelling into the future was not one of them. We apologise for the error, which, we suspect, would have greatly amused him.



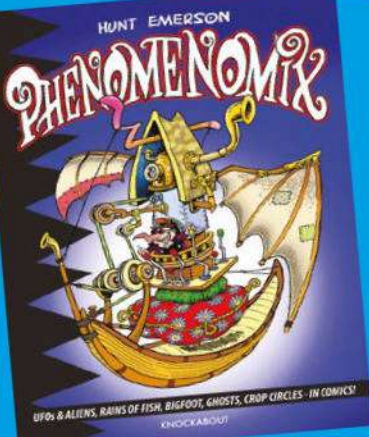
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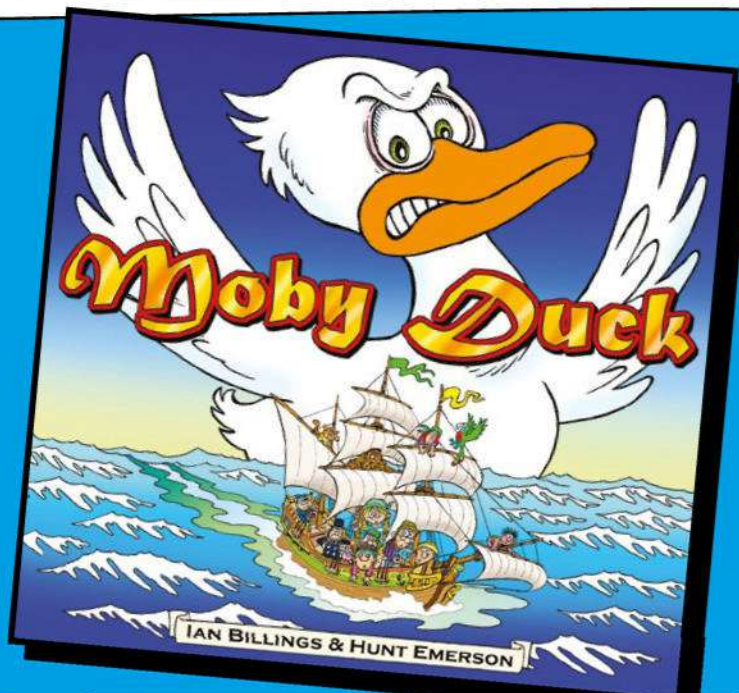
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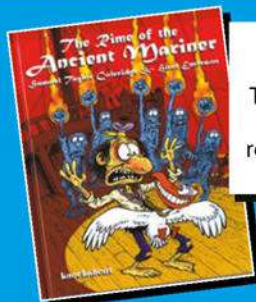
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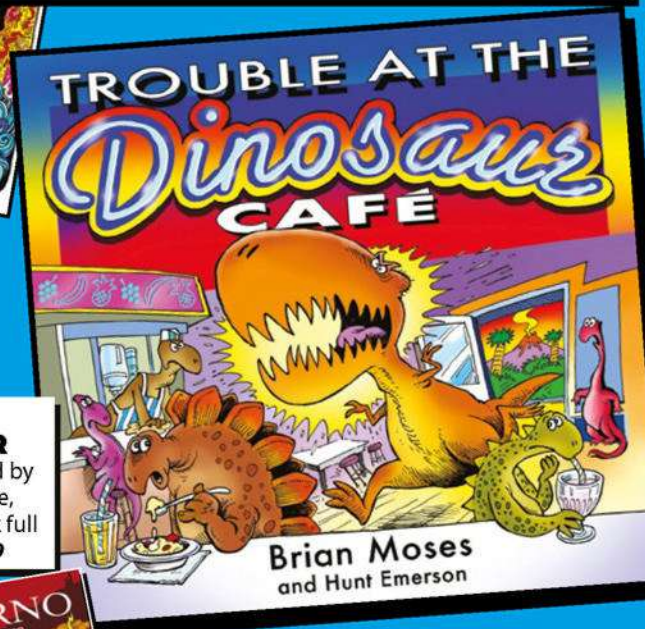
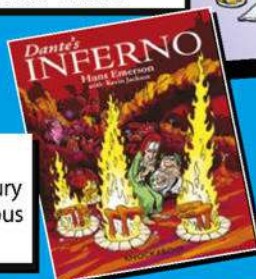
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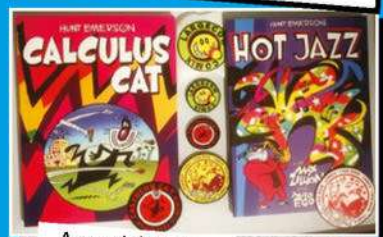
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

ALIEN BEEF BOTHERERS? | Cattle mutilations back in the news in the USA and Australia



ABOVE LEFT: A striking graphic from the Madison County Sheriff's Office highlighting the recent cases. ABOVE RIGHT: A dead cow on Mick and Judy Cook's Queensland ranch.

Police in Madison County, Texas, have been left baffled by a wave of recent cattle mutilations. The Madison County Sheriff's Office was first made aware of a case involving a six-year-old longhorn cross that was discovered dead at a local ranch. The cow was found lying on its side with its tongue removed. A statement from the Sheriff's Office said: "A straight, clean cut, with apparent precision, had been made to remove the hide around the cow's mouth on one side, leaving the meat under the removed hide untouched. The tongue was also completely removed from the body with no blood spill. It was noted there were no signs of struggle and the grass around the cow was undisturbed. No footprints or tire tracks were noted in the area." Ranchers told police that, unusually, no birds or predators had scavenged the carcass, leaving it to rot for several weeks.

While investigating the incident, officers learned of five further cases in the vicinity of Texas State Highway 50, spanning Madison, Brazos and Robertson counties. These incidents, which involved the death and mutilation of four

"A clean cut, with apparent precision, had been made"

adult cattle and a yearling, took place "in different locations, pastures, and herds." Each animal was discovered in the same circumstances as the first: on its side, dead, with its tongue removed. In addition, the Sheriff's office stated, in the cases of two of the animals, "a circular cut was made removing the anus and external genitalia. The circular cut was made with the same precision as the cuts noted around the jaw lines of each cow." Again, said police, there were no signs of struggle, no footprints or tracks, and predators had not touched the remains.

Investigators say the cause of the deaths remains unknown and that "multiple similar incidents have been reported across the United States and we are actively coordinating with other agencies to find answers."

These cases recall the cattle

mutilations that spread fear and anger among US ranchers in the 1970s when hundreds – or, according to some accounts, thousands – of cows were found dead bearing similar mysterious injuries and with body parts removed. Blame was placed on everything from Satanists using the organs in their rituals to mysterious government helicopters and, of course, UFOs. Investigations by the FBI and ATF, and subsequent experiments using dead cows to replicate the visible signs of cattle mutilation, have concluded that most (but not all) cases of apparent mutilation could be explained by various natural causes such as predation, the work of scavengers and carrion-eating insects and changes to the carcasses made by post-mortem bloating leading to skin shrinkage and tearing. Many ranchers, not to mention UFO buffs and 'mutologists', did not always accept such conclusions.

Meanwhile in Australia, a farming couple are adamant that alien intervention is the only explanation for their own mutilation mystery. Judy and Mick Cook, who graze over 1,000 cattle on their 14,600 hectare

property near Eungella, Queensland, say that since 2018, 20 of their cows have been found dead in inexplicable circumstances, with organs removed with surgical precision and no trace of blood left at the scene. "How is it happening?" Mr Cook asked the *Daily Mercury*. "It must have something that lifts it up and puts it down and doesn't leave any marks." Aliens, he says, are "the only explanation I've got," adding that both he and his wife have seen "really strange lights in the sky around our property."

Mrs Cook wondered whether there was "something going on that the general public doesn't know about, maybe... something being kept hidden from us." But she remains philosophical about the alien threat: "If they want to, they are going to come and get you. So what's the use of worrying?"

News.com.au, 3 Apr; *nytimes.com*, *spectrumlocalnews.com*, 22 April; *abcnews.go.com*, 24 April; *southwestjournal.com*, 25 April 2023.

For more on cattle mutilations, see FT26:14-20, 68:23-29, 163:24, 220:29, 295:28, 302:46-49, 336:22, 342:22.



SILENT SPY SCIENCE

The secrets of espionage by balloon

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BURN, WITCH, BURN!

All the news from Weird Weekend North

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BIRDING BLUNDER

The curious case of the Zurich 'penguin'

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KENYAN CULT

Church leader in court after more than 100 church members starved themselves to death



ABOVE: Holes left after bodies were exhumed at the mass-grave site in Shakahola, outside the coastal town of Malindi, Kenya.
BELOW: Pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, leader of the cult-like Good News International Church.

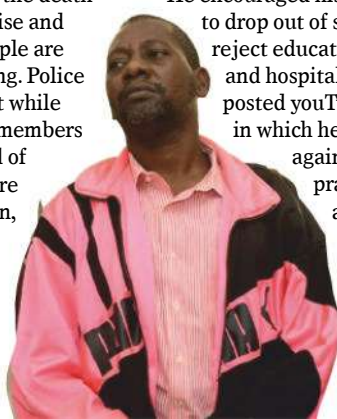
A Kenyan preacher, Pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, has appeared in court accused of inciting his followers to starve themselves to death after the discovery of more than 100 bodies in the fringe church's remote forest community of Shakahola in the coastal county of Kilifi. Police had received tip-offs from human rights activists about the church's activities and from local people about individuals going missing and began searching the 800-acre woodland in April. Soon, they had uncovered some 65 sites where people had been buried, often in shallow mass graves. So far 109 bodies have been exhumed, but the death toll is expected to rise and hundreds more people are still reported missing. Police have suggested that while most of the church members appear to have died of starvation, some bore sign of strangulation, suffocation or beatings.

Over half of the dead were children, and there have been suggestions from ex-church members that they were meant to die first before being followed by their parents and other adults as the church prepared for the end of the world. Mackenzie is said to have encouraged his flock to starve themselves to death in order to "meet Jesus".

The 50-year-old Mackenzie, a former taxi driver, started his Good News International Church in Malindi in 2003, and was described by former church members as an accomplished and persuasive preacher whose teachings became increasingly bizarre and disturbing over time. He encouraged his followers

to drop out of school and reject education, doctors and hospitals and posted YouTube videos in which he railed against "demonic" practices, such as wearing wigs and using digital

currencies. In 2017, he moved the church out of a compound in Malindi, the nearest major town, to the more remote location of Shakahola – the name came from a Swahili word that loosely translates as "a place where worries are lifted" – where followers lived in 'villages' with biblical place names like Bethlehem and Nazareth. Two hours' drive from town, Shakahola had no Internet access or mobile network, and church members were discouraged from maintaining contact with family or friends in the outside world. The church appeared to follow classic patterns seen in cults, said Isabell Zattu, a psychologist at the Coast General Hospital in Mombasa, and the case has drawn comparisons with previous cult-related mass deaths, including Jonestown (FT29:54-55), Waco (FT133:34-38) and the Uganda Doomsday Sect (FT135:34-38). *D. Telegraph, 29 April, 2 May; BBC News, Guardian, 2 May 2023.*



EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BADGER SET TO MAKE HISTORY AT WORLD CUP

Morning Star, 21 Oct 2022.

Bellringers silenced by secret squirrel in church raid

Richmond and Twickenham Times, 2 Mar 2023.

HEADLESS MAN NO LONGER FACELESS

D.Telegraph, 16 April 2022.

Tasmanian couple arrested over sex videos involving live trout and a grave

news.com.au, 1 Feb 2023.

MICROPIGS FOUND TIED TO LAMPPOST

Kent Online, 13 Jan 2023.

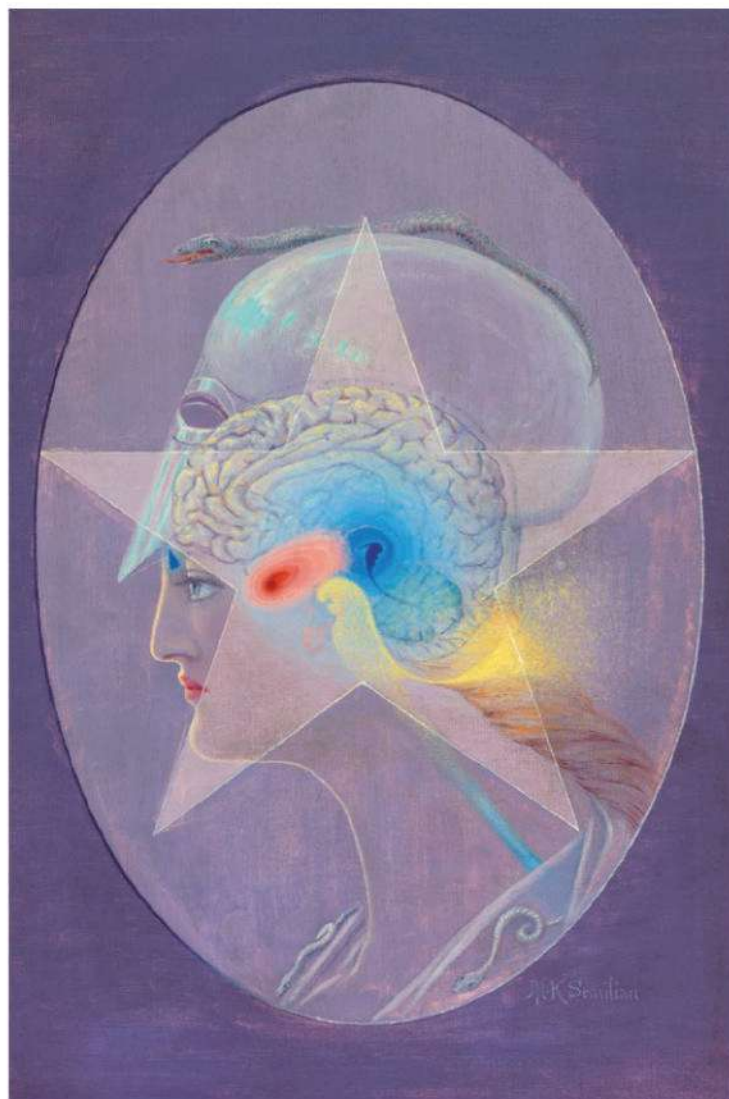
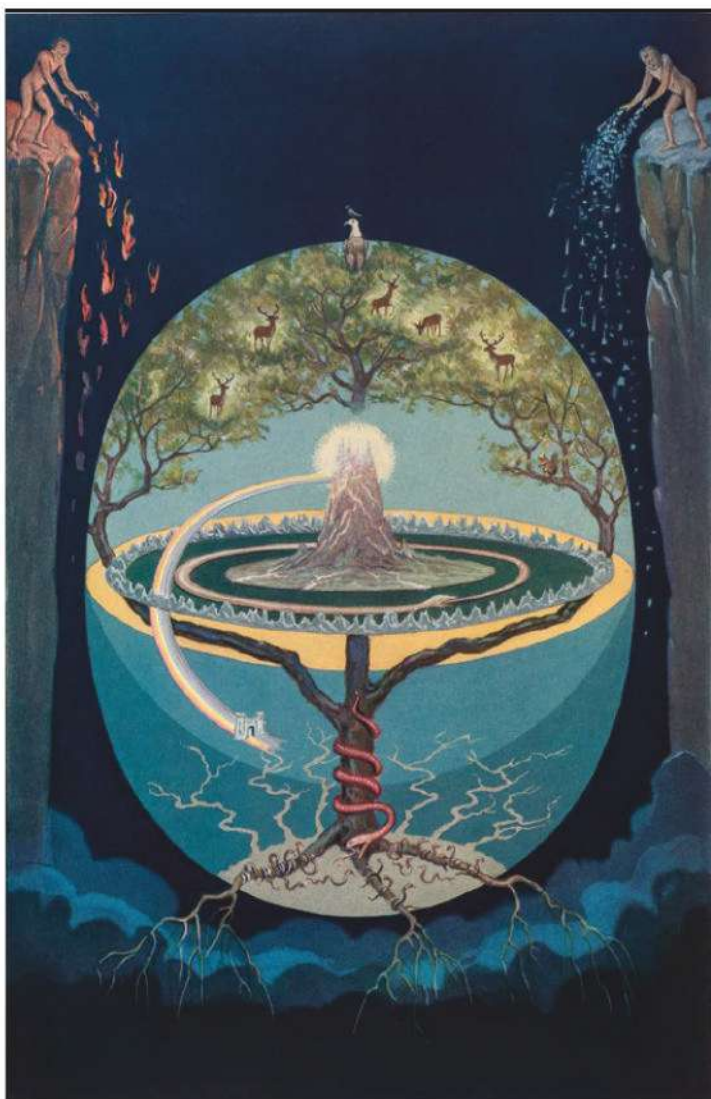
Caged chicken cannibal fear

Daily Star, 8 Nov 2022.

SECRET TEACHINGS

With a price tag of £500 this new edition of Manly P Hall's *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* is unlikely to make its way onto the library shelves of Fortean Towers, but we can at least share some glorious images plucked from its pages. Embracing an expansive range of occult teachings, this vast encyclopædia unveils the arcane myths and mysteries of thousands of years of human civilisation. First published in 1928, Hall's magnum opus has been meticulously reproduced in its original size in collaboration with his archives at the Philosophical Research Society. Available from www.taschen.com/en/

RIGHT: Cover. **BELOW LEFT:** J Augustus Knapp, *The Yggdrasil Tree*. **BELOW RIGHT:** MK Serailian, *The Opening of the Third Eye*, 1926. **FACING PAGE:** J Augustus Knapp, *Hermes Standing Upon the Back of Typhon*.







SIDELINES

LAND AHoy!

Britain has a brand-new island, five miles off Lymington in the Solent, between the Isle of Wight and the rest of the country. Measuring 330ft by 65ft (100m by 20m), the island has been named Lentune Island after the original name for Lymington and has been claimed for the UK by two sailors from Lymington Yacht Club, Chris Fox and Nick Ryley, who planted the club's flag on it. The island formed naturally, probably as a result of sea defence work at nearby Hurst Castle altering local currents. uk.news.yahoo.com, 1 Mar 2023.

FLAME JOB

Public health officials in Middlesbrough, Cleveland, are investigating a local restaurant after a video shot by a passer-by went viral. The video seems to show a man outside the back door of the restaurant cooking a chicken by suspending it in a shopping trolley and blasting it with the flame from a blowtorch connected to a large propane tank. In the clip the man filming it can be heard to say "F***ing hell, I'm not eating that!" mirror.co.uk, 2 Mar 2023

LUCKY FISH

Cindy Lao from Bristol bought several fish for her freezer from a London fishmonger, including a Crucian carp. 48 hours after returning home, she got the fish out of her fridge and was surprised to find that the carp's gills were still moving so Lao and her partner Paul Lewis-Borman put the fish in their bath, and after 20 minutes it perked up and fully recovered. "Needless to say, he could not stay there, and it did put you off when you were trying to use the toilet," said Lewis-Borman, so the fish, now named Lazarus, has been found a home with a local koi carp enthusiast. bristolpost.co.uk, 2 Mar 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

CATHOLIC NEWS

Puffa Pope, Vatican X-Files, vanishing BVM and the Devils own board game



AI POPE

In March, a photo of Pope Francis wearing a particularly cool and funky puffer coat went viral on social media after appearing without comment in a tweet by a user named Leon (@skyferrori), garnering the Pontiff much admiration for his style choices. This was swiftly followed up by a disclaimer pointing out that the image is not a real one and had, in fact, been generated by the AI image synthesis programme Midjourney v5. Close inspection reveals the fingerprints of an image AI in the strange crucifix the Pope is wearing, the poorly executed right hand and the shadow of his glasses, but the image is a testament to the increasing sophistication of such systems. arstechnica.com, 27 Mar 2023.



ABOVE: The BVM billboard erected in Milan in March 2023. RIGHT: Maria Scarpulla, known to her followers as Gisella Cardia, has skipped town.

The statue has been weeping blood on the third of every month

BVM BLEEDS DONORS?

For over five years a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) at Trevignano near Rome in Italy has been apparently weeping tears of blood on the third of every month. The statue was bought by local businesswoman Maria Giuseppe Scarpulla from the Medjugorje pilgrimage site in Bosnia in 2016, and, shortly after her return to Italy, she claimed that the BVM had started weeping blood and

was communicating messages to her. To accommodate the hundreds of pilgrims who turned up for the miracle, many hoping for healing from serious illnesses, Scarpulla, known to her followers as Gisella Cardia, placed the statue in a glass case overlooking nearby Lake Bracciano. This was built on land reportedly purchased by a foundation Scarpulla had set up to collect donations and sell replica statues, which she said would also fund a centre for sick children. The statue had relatively little publicity until March, when an unknown person erected a billboard promoting the BVM. For some reason this was in Milan, which is over 600km (373 miles) away from Trevignano. It featured the statue of the BVM, with a crucifix in the background, and the words "I shall wipe your tears" and "Madonna of Trevignano Romano (RM)" which also appear on the foundation's website.

This coincided with Monsignor Marco Salvi, the Bishop of Civita Castellana, who is responsible for Trevignano, setting up a Diocesan Commission to investigate the statue after complaints from locals about the growing hordes of pilgrims descending on the





village each month. This was closely followed by a judicial investigation into Scarpulla, triggered by a claim from a private investigator that the blood on the statue came from a pig and that donors were being scammed. One donor told the newspaper *La Repubblica* that he and his wife had donated 123,000 euros (£109,000) to Scarpulla's foundation. "We were both ill, we trusted her, it was a clamorous error," he said, while another told them, "At the beginning, I believed her, but then she made me feel scared." Despite the investigations, 300 pilgrims still turned up for the April miracle, when Scarpulla shared a new message, allegedly from the BVM, reportedly saying "Beloved children, this is the moment and time for choice. I ask you as a grieving mother: choose God. Children, the threads of darkness are gripping you." However, by the end of the week Scarpulla and her husband had vanished, having been seen packing up their car and leaving the village, with no one being sure where they had gone. Some locals believed Scarpulla had gone abroad, while others thought she had returned to her native Sicily or sought refuge in a monastery. Her lawyer, though, maintains she has just gone on holiday, asserting that "this is sensationalism at all costs... the witch-hunt is galloping and nobody seems willing to ascertain facts. I can only say that we will defend ourselves." Meanwhile, the foundation's website says meetings with the faithful are "temporarily suspended". *La Stampa (Italy)*, 4 Mar; *theguardian.com*, 11 Apr 2023.

VATICAN X-FILES

The Vatican News has announced the establishment of the Pontifical Mariana International Academy (PAMI), described as a scientific institution of the Holy See, to act as a dedicated observatory for the investigation of "mystical phenomena" around the world, including weeping statues, stigmata and ghosts. Mariologist Father Gian Matteo Roggio, who has previously spoken of the need for the Vatican to recruit more exorcists, said, "In Italy there are

around 100 ongoing phenomena that the Church is following closely." Although it is still awaiting formal authentication by the Catholic Church, the organisation is poised to investigate these, including the Trevignano BVM, and has its eyes on many international phenomena as well, intending to introduce local scientific committees to enable more investigations to take place. Father Stefano Cecchin, part of the Academy, says that it will "promote updating and training activities on this type of events and their multiple spiritual and cultural meanings, promote high dissemination and consultancy activities, especially at the service of local churches and bishops, but also trans-disciplinary research activities in concert with academic institutions, both lay and ecclesiastical, and the publication of the results of the researches carried out." *dailymail.co.uk*, 14 Apr 2023.

DEVIL'S BOARD GAME

Father Ernesto Caro, an exorcist with the Diocese of Monterey, Mexico, has denounced a Christian "Holy Spirit" board game as "not a game" at all, but

instead "a trap from the Devil". While the game's packaging claims it allows people to "communicate directly with Jesus Christ" and the text on Amazon says it's "perfect for churches, prayer groups, or just getting together with friends" the layout is similar to that of a Ouija board. The usual imagery has been replaced with Christian symbols like angels and a dove, and it has a cross instead of the planchette that moves over the letters to spell out messages. While the manufacturers assure potential buyers that "unlike other spirit boards, this one will NEVER contact evil ghosts or demons, so you can ask your questions with an assured sense of safety" and promise that you will "GET THE ANSWERS YOU NEED! — The Holy Spirit Board can answer all of life's most important questions, straight from the man himself!" Caro condemns it as just a Ouija board repackaged to trick Christians into using it. He exhorts anyone who has bought the game to "repent and ask God for liberation" by going to confession and asking the priest to give an extra blessing for protection. *catholicnewsagency.com*, 31 Mar 2023.



ABOVE: Is the Holy Spirit Board harmless fun or "a trap from the Devil"

SIDELINES

ISCREAM, YOU SCREAM

Thomas Micolino's ice cream parlour in Rottenburg am Neckar, southern Germany, has a reputation for creating innovative and experimental flavours. Previously, he has offered ice cream covered in gold leaf, as well as liver sausage and gorgonzola cheese ice cream. He is now offering cricket flavour, made of insect flour with dried crickets on top. "I am a very curious person and want to try everything," he says, adding that his cricket concoction has a "surprisingly yummy taste", although some customers are upset that he is even offering the flavour. *expressandstar.com*, 2 Mar 2023.

BALLOON AWAY

A Chinese man, named only as Hu, was using a large hydrogen balloon to hoist him and a partner into the treetops to collect pine nuts in Heilongjiang province, when it slipped its mooring and started to float away. Hu's colleague managed to jump off, but Hu was swept aloft with the balloon. After a desperate search, rescuers were able to contact Hu by phone the following morning, advising him to slowly deflate the balloon to bring it down safely. He eventually landed 200 miles away, suffering from nothing more than a pain in his back. </>, 10 Sept 2022.

KNOCK, KNOCK

A resident of Daytona Beach, Florida, heard a knock on his front door late one evening and thinking it was someone looking for his son, went to answer it. On opening the door though, he found an angry eight-foot (2.4m) alligator on his front porch, which lunged at him and bit his thigh. *eu.news-journalonline.com*, 6 Mar 2023.

HELLO?

Physicist John Hems has captured the world record for the longest distance call made with a tin can and string telephone. His device, in fact made using two yogurt pots and wire, was 374 metres (1,227ft) long and stretched from the lookout point at Connaught Gardens to Bedford Steps on the Esplanade in Sidmouth, Devon, from where Hems successfully received the call from his colleague Dr George Littlejohn saying: "This is Sidmouth Science Festival world record tin can telephone." *Sidmouthherald.co.uk*, 9 Mar 2023.



SIDELINES...

HIDAD

A 17-year-old using a cash machine in Cranhill, Glasgow, was pounced on by a hooded man who held a knife at his throat and demanded money. The victim, though, recognised his assailant from his voice and eyes as his father and said "Are you serious? Do you know who this is?" to which the man replied "I'm sorry, I'm desperate," before fleeing. He was later arrested at home and in court his lawyer said: "His mother, brother and son are all extremely angry at him." *bbc.co.uk/news*, 10 Mar 2023.

HANDY

A dog walker in Staten Island, New York, got a macabre surprise when his dog returned carrying a human hand. Fingerprinting showed that it belonged to a 63-year-old woman who had died in 2011 and was buried in a cemetery about a mile away from where the hand was found. Her grave had recently been disturbed during an interment in a neighbouring plot, but authorities could not explain how her hand ended up a mile away. *boston-25news.com*, 11 Mar 2023.

FIGHT! FIGHT!

After world champion boxer Tyson Fury claimed he used mind power to beat his opponents, psychic Uri Geller has challenged him to a telepathic battle, saying "anyone who can master telepathy and knocking out or confusing his opponent is going to win." *D.Mirror*, 26 Nov 2022.

SELFIE SURPRISE

Wildlife officials checking on one of their motion-activated trailcams from thousands of acres of wilderness outside Boulder, Colorado, were surprised to find that out of the 580 images it had taken, 400 were of the same bear. <i>30 Jan 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

MEDICAL BAG

In the doctor's waiting room this month: coulrophobes, nose-pickers and swearers.



LEFT: What makes clowns scary? Exaggerated facial features, media depictions and the 'uncanny valley' effect among other things.

FEAR OF CLOWNS

Research from the University of South Wales published in *Frontiers in Psychology* claims to have got to the bottom of why so many people are afraid of clowns. The researchers carried out an international survey involving 1,000 adult participants from 64 countries and discovered that more than half of them suffered from coulrophobia, as the fear of clowns is known (see FT226:34-41), to some degree. Five per cent admitted to being "extremely afraid" of clowns, a higher percentage than suffered from more familiar phobias such as fear of heights, enclosed spaces, or animals.

The main reasons people gave for fearing clowns was their exaggerated facial features and the makeup they wear hiding the emotional signals we usually get from facial expressions. In some cases, the fear was triggered by the depiction of evil clowns in the media, such as Pennywise in Stephen King's *It*, while others found their unpredictable behaviour scary. One of the least common causes, though, was having had a frightening personal experience with clowns. The researchers suspect that none

of the individual elements may be in itself frightening, "but rather the juxtaposition of these features" is what is scaring people.

They also think that because clowns do not appear entirely human, the "uncanny valley" effect may also come into play here, and that it is possible that the unnaturally red and white makeup they use may be unconsciously "reminiscent of disease and contagion" and so trigger our latent fear of infection. "These factors can combine to give a clown an appearance of deformity, to which (sadly, but nevertheless unavoidably) humans have a natural reaction of revulsion and fear," say the psychologists, who called for more research to test this hypothesis further. *independent.co.uk*, 7 Mar 2023.

%&*#@!!!!

A survey of 2,000 British people carried out by insights agency Perspectus Global investigated how effective swearing is at fighting pain. They found that 64 per cent of respondents regularly swore when they did something like stubbing their toe and believed that it helped lessen the pain. "Fuck" was the most popular word used after

stubbing a toe, and 52 per cent felt this was the most effective pain reliever; "shit" (50%), "bloody hell" (25%) and "damn" (23%) were viewed as the next most effective. Neuropsychologist Dr Rachel Taylor said: "The science shows that when people swear, it can activate the amygdala which in turn triggers a fight-or-flight response. This then leads to a surge in adrenaline, a natural form of pain relief." She added that: "Interestingly, research also suggests that conventional swear words are better at pain relief than novel ones, and also indicates that if you reserve swearing just for pain relief they are more analgesic [pain relieving] than if you are a prolific swearer – you can become immune to the pain relief of swearing if you swear a lot." *metro.co.uk*, 26 Mar 2023.

FOREIGN ACCENT SYNDROME

A man in his 50s from North Carolina spontaneously developed an "uncontrollable Irish accent" after 20 months of treatment for prostate cancer, despite having no Irish relatives or having ever visited Ireland. His case was reported in the *British Medical Journal* by the doctors who treated him. "His accent was uncontrollable, present in all settings and gradually became persistent," they said, adding that he "had no neurological examination abnormalities, psychiatric history or MRI of the brain abnormalities at symptom onset." They suspect his new accent was the result of paraneoplastic neurological disorder, which happens when cancer patients' immune systems attack parts of their brain. Also developing a surprising new accent was an Italian woman aged 50. After an episode where she experienced slurred speech and difficulties writing for



about five minutes, she was admitted to hospital, where it was found that while her speech had returned to normal, she now spoke both Italian and English with a pronounced Canadian accent. Brain scans showed no sign of abnormalities, and although she had Covid the week before her episode, she tested negative at the hospital. Medics suspect her new accent could be the result of microscopic brain lesions that do not show up on scans, possibly resulting from her Covid infection, which can sometimes cause lingering neurological problems as part of “long Covid”. Alternatively, they suggested she might be suffering from psychogenic foreign accent syndrome, where the change in accent is a result of psychological rather than physical causes. Even eight months later, the woman’s accent remained as strong as when it had first appeared, although medics could still find no physical cause for the change. *BBBC News*, 17 Feb 2023; *livescience.com* 10 Feb 2023.

BORN WITH A TAIL

A girl born at a hospital in rural Mexico surprised doctors by arriving with a tail 5.7cm (2in) long and 3.5mm (0.1in) in diameter. It was covered in skin and hair and contained muscle and nerves that were connected to the rest of the child’s nervous system so that she cried when it was prodded with a needle.

It was found the tail had grown in proportion to the rest of her body

Apart from the tail, the girl was in good health and showed no other abnormalities. X-rays showed that the tail did not contain any bones or abnormal structures, so qualified as a “true tail”. Satisfied that the girl was healthy, she was allowed to go home with her parents and at a check-up two months later it was found that the tail had grown in proportion to the rest of her body, so her doctors decided to remove it and reconstruct the area with plastic surgery. *jpost.com*, 14 Feb 2023.

NOSE FOR TROUBLE

A study by researchers at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, has revealed that picking your nose could increase your risk of Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia. They have shown that the bacterium *Chlamydia pneumoniae* can use the olfactory nerve that connects the nasal cavity to the brain as a way to invade the nervous system. In experiments with mice, they found that when the bacteria get into the nerve, they can travel up it to the brain, avoiding the blood-brain barrier that usually keeps them

ABOVE: The 5.7cm tail surgically removed from a young girl in Mexico.

out. The brain then responds by laying down the amyloid protein plaques typical of Alzheimer’s. Professor James St John, lead author of the research, said that “the evidence is potentially scary for humans,” explaining that damaging the nasal membranes makes it easier for bacteria to get into the nerves. “Picking your nose and plucking the hairs from your nose are not a good idea.” *neurosciencenews.com*, 28 Oct 2022.

DELICATE OPERATION

In Ukraine, doctors in Kyiv successfully collaborated with military sappers to extract an unexploded grenade from the chest of a wounded soldier. The munition was lodged just below the man’s heart and needed the sappers to defuse it before it could be removed by medics. The operation needed to be carried out without using electrocoagulation equipment, a technique often used to control bleeding, as it still had the potential to detonate the explosive within the device, even once it was defused. “The unexploded part of the grenade was taken from under the heart. The grenade did not explode, but remained explosive,” said Anton Gerashchenko, Ukraine’s internal affairs ministerial adviser. “I think this case will go down in medical textbooks”. *theguardian.com*, 12 Jan 2023.

SIDELINES...

EVERLASTING EGG

Convincingly beating the previous oldest easter egg (**FT410:7**) by nearly 50 years, Eric Boden, 93, has a 92-year old Nestle milk chocolate egg, wrapped in red and silver foil with a big ribbon round it. He was given the egg as a baby in 1931 and it was put away so he could enjoy it when he was older. It was then forgotten about until Boden’s parents died and he rediscovered it clearing out their house. “I always knew the Easter egg was there, but I didn’t know where,” he said, and has kept it safe in a cool, dark cupboard ever since. *metro.co.uk*, 13 Mar 2023.

SAVED BY A PSALM

An Israeli caught up in a bomb attack in Jerusalem had a lucky escape when a piece of lethal shrapnel was stopped by a copy of the Book of Psalms that he had in his pocket. The shrapnel partly pierced the book, penetrating to Psalm 124, which reads, “Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunters’ snare; the snare broke, and we escaped”. *unitedwithisrael.org*, 28 Nov 2022.

SAUSAGE PARTY

Surfdale, on New Zealand’s Waiheke Island, has been plagued by a mysterious prankster dubbed “The Surfdale Sausager” who has been posting sausages slathered in tomato ketchup and wrapped in bread through residents’ letterboxes in the middle of the night for over a year. “It happens at least once a month, at the very bare minimum,” says Jacob, a Surfdale resident, adding, “I know you’re out there. Just know one thing: You will be unmasked and your horrible deeds will be [known] by the community and you will be shunned.” *nzherald.co.nz*, 22 Jan 2023.

YES, IT’S SMALL

The smallest house in Great Britain is in Conwy, North Wales, and is a tourist attraction drawing up to 55,000 people a year, despite only being 72 inches (1.8m) wide by 122 inches (3m) high. Not all visitors appreciate it, with one complaining that it is “a very small house” and others that not many people can fit in. At one point, though, it was home to a family of six and its last inhabitant was 6ft 3in Robert Jones, who could not stand up straight in any of its rooms. *metro.co.uk*, 22 Jan 2023.



SIDELINES...

SUSHI TERROR

Japan's *kaitenzushi* conveyor belt sushi restaurants are in the grip of what has been called "sushi terrorism" after a wave of videos were posted on social media showing people deliberately interfering with the food and playing pranks on customers. These include licking communal soy sauce bottles, putting hot wasabi on passing dishes and covertly touching other people's food. This has caused widespread outrage and plummeting share values for the *kaitenzushi* chains, who have responded by installing CCTV cameras over their conveyors. *theguardian.co.uk*, 3 Feb 2023.

COCK UP

At the peak of its annual garden bird survey, the Big Garden Birdwatch, where people record and submit bird sightings from their gardens, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the UK's leading ornithology charity, was suddenly banned from Twitter. "It's all a bit of a mystery," said the BTO's Tom Stewart. Further investigation, though, revealed that site's anti-porn algorithms had taken exception to them tweeting about sightings of woodcock. *BBC News*, 31 Jan 2023.

ARTIFICIAL IMBECILE

In order to help train an AI robot designed to detect humans, US military research agency DARPA gave a group of Marines the task of trying to sneak up on it. The most successful did so by hiding under a cardboard box, possibly revealing themselves to be fans of the *Metal Gear Solid* video game series, where this ruse is used. *ukpcmag.com*, 19 Jan 2023.



ANIMAL ODDITIES

Pokemon-playing fish, snake sex and defensive wasp genitalia



ABOVE LEFT: Pokemon-playing fish that managed to use a Japanese YouTuber's credit card to go on a spending spree in the Nintendo eShop. ABOVE RIGHT: A frog attempts to eat a male mason wasp, but hasn't reckoned with its stabbing penis.



FISH HACKERS

Japanese YouTuber "Mutekimaru Channel" set up a system by which his tank of betta fish could play Pokémon with the idea of seeing how long it would take them to beat the game by making random moves. He did this by pointing a webcam at their tank, linked to motion-tracking software that monitored the fish as they swam across an overlaid grid populated with Nintendo Switch controller inputs. When a fish stopped or changed direction over one of the grid squares, the software would convert this to a "click" on the relevant input. He then livestreamed this to his YouTube followers. Humans can usually complete the game in about 30 hours, but the fish took much longer. They had reached the 1,144-hour point when the game crashed, but Mutekimaru didn't immediately notice and left the fish contributing random inputs to the system as it automatically rebooted. The first result was that the fish changed his Nintendo account name from "Mutekimaru" to "ROWAWAWAWAY". Next, they got into the Nintendo eShop on two separate occasions and used Mutekimaru's saved credit card details to buy 500-yen (£3) worth of in-game points, exposing his credit card details to everyone on the livestream as they did so. Then they used some of these points to buy a new avatar and download the N64 emulator, as well as getting

PayPal to send Mutekimaru a setup confirmation email. Eventually, though, in their random wandering, they succeeded in turning the Switch console off. Mutekimaru only realised something was going on when he got the PayPal email and worked out what happened, which, when he explained it to Nintendo got him a refund of his 500 yen. He has now retired his fish from gaming. *tvpworld.com*, 25 Jan 2023.

SEX LIVES OF SNAKES

A wide range of vertebrates have clitorises, from crocodiles to dolphins, although birds seem to have lost them over the course of evolution. This was thought to be the case with snakes too, despite their close relatives, lizards, possessing a pair of clitorises, known as hemiclitorises, and male snakes having paired hemipeneses. Now, evolutionary biologist Megan Folwell, of the University of Adelaide in Australia, has found that snakes do, in fact, have clitorises, following a programme of detailed snake sex dissection, which suggests snake sex lives may be more complex than previously thought. The organ had been missed because it is small and fragile and, unlike lizard hemiclitorises, couldn't turn out externally. Folwell also says that they had evaded discovery because female genitalia have historically been seen as "quite taboo", pointing out that "even

in humans, the proper function and significance of the human clitoris was still being discussed in 2006." *sciencenews.org*, 13 Dec 2022.

DICK DEFENCE

Japanese entomologist Shinju Sugiura was handling a male mason wasp (*Anterhynchium gibbifrons*) when it unexpectedly stung her. This piqued her curiosity as only female wasps are supposed to be able to sting because their venomous stingers are modified egg-laying organs. Males were considered harmless. Looking at the wasp, Sugiura realised that it hadn't actually stung her, it had stabbed her using its sharp two-pronged genitalia as a pseudostinger. To test whether this was a one-off or something that male wasps used regularly to fight off attackers, Sugiura and colleagues put male wasps in an enclosure with a tree frog, one of their predators, and observed what happened. They found that when a frog went for the wasp, they tried to stab them with their sharp penises, and got spat out about a third of the time. When they did the same thing with wasps that had their penises removed, every wasp got eaten. This was the first time male genitalia have been discovered to have a defensive role in the animal kingdom and Sugiura and her team are now extending their research to see if other wasps behave in the same way. *science.org*, 19 Dec 2022.



Silent spies

DAVID HAMBLING looks at the secret science of balloon espionage

The initial panic over a Chinese 'spy balloon' shot down by American jets in February may have died down (see **FT430:28-29**), even though two subsequent unidentified balloons were also downed, but many questions remain about just what they were and what they were doing.

First, a little history. The Japanese attacked the US Pacific coast with a wave of small Fu-Go balloons dropping incendiary bombs in 1944-45, in an attempt to set the Pacific forests on fire (see **FT378:28**). Were the balloons launched from merchant ships off the coast, or from submarines? Did they come from inside the US, maybe even from internment camps?

Analysis of Fu-Go sand ballast revealed that, incredibly, they came all the way from Japan. Japanese scientists had discovered the jet stream, a fast-moving ribbon of air in the stratosphere, and used it to transport their balloons the 9,000km (5,600 miles) to America. US officials kept the attacks quiet for fear of alarming the public, but a special unit of firefighting paratroopers was assigned to deal with fires, and presumably to cover up the cause.

After the war, the US military commenced their own classified long-range balloon programmes, including some to deliver WMD. But they could also be used to gather intelligence before satellites, when there was no way to see inside the USSR. The CIA, working with the USAF, launched gigantic 'weather balloons' fitted with downward-pointing cameras taking pictures as they drifted east over Russia. Russia shot down as many of these intruders as they could. Of the 512 balloons launched from Norway, Scotland, Germany and Turkey, only 54 were recovered and only 31 had usable pictures. The resulting images, of random locations, provided little useful intelligence.

New developments have made spy balloons attractive again. The stratosphere, as the name implies, is stratified into narrow layers, each with wind moving in a different direction. In theory, you can steer a balloon to any point on Earth just by changing altitude, and remain in the area by making small circles. Achieving this requires a good model of the atmosphere and advanced machine learning algorithms.

A similar idea was used in Google parent company Alphabet's Project Loon to provide Internet via high-altitude balloons. The initial idea was just to send a stream of balloons over the area to be covered, but this was refined as it became



Steerable stratospheric balloons attracted the interest of military and intelligence agencies

clear steerable balloons could position themselves by changing altitude to find favourable winds. Loon's steerable balloons worked well enough to provide Internet access to 100,000 people in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017, although the project has since been scrapped.

However, steerable stratospheric balloons attracted the attention of the military and intelligence agencies. While satellites just pass over every 90 minutes, balloons can maintain surveillance of an area of interest for days at a time, thanks to solar panels providing unlimited endurance. Balloons are far cheaper than satellites, and can be launched at will. "We think this has the potential to be a game changer for us," Admiral Kurt Tidd, commander of US Southern Command, told the media after a successful exercise in 2018.

These balloons are sometimes reported as UFOs. Little is known about the US balloon intelligence programme, but budget documents mention several including Covert Long Dwell Stratospheric Architecture (COLD STAR), a stratospheric balloon with autonomous navigation and advanced sensors. 'Covert' may be the key word.

China denies that its balloon flew over US nuclear facilities in Montana on purpose, saying it only arrived in America by accident.

"It is a civilian airship used for research, mainly meteorological, purposes. Affected by the Westerlies and with limited self-steering capability, the airship deviated far

LEFT: The Chinese spy balloon photographed over Billings, Montana, on 23 February 2023 by local resident Chase Doak.

from its planned course. The Chinese side regrets the unintended entry of the airship into US airspace," according to a Chinese Foreign Ministry Statement.

USAF General Patrick Ryder told a press briefing that: "We know this is a Chinese balloon and that it has the ability to manoeuvre." National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters the Chinese balloon had propellers, presumably to augment its ability to navigate.

US officials played down the idea that the Chinese could have learned anything they did not know from satellites. This is questionable. Chinese researchers have previously experimented with launching drones from stratospheric balloons, ostensibly for search and rescue, but with obvious spying capability. And the US Army has plans to drop thousands of tiny electronic sensors from stratospheric balloons to get intelligence from the ground.

The US recovered much of the debris from the downed balloon, but has yet to reveal any details of what it found.

The debris from the smaller balloons is unlikely to be recovered, but there is reason to believe that at least one was not a spy but was an amateur radio 'pico' balloon launched by hobbyists. These metallic balloons are typically a metre across and carry a solar-powered radio transmitter and GPS, ascending into the stratosphere and continuously broadcasting their location. While the spy balloon had a gondola bigger than a car, the pico balloon instrument package is smaller than a smartphone. They have no steering but simply ride the wind, and enthusiasts track their progress on the Internet as ham radio enthusiasts pick up the signal and report back. Pico balloons can circumnavigate the globe several times before failing.

A pico balloon with the callsign K9YO-15 disappeared at the time one of the balloons was shot down, and appeared to be in the right, or the wrong, area at the time.

Will we now see an increasing number of 'grey zone' incursions by Chinese balloons? And is the US flying its balloons over China as the Chinese claim? "Operationalize the stratosphere" – that is, make it a field of military operations – is a new US Army slogan. Like space, the upper atmosphere may turn into a new field of conflict.



MAGIC, WITCHES & WEIRDNESS

ROB GANDY reports from Weekend North 2023

The newly refurbished Rixton-with-Glazebrook Community Hall hosted the sixth Weird Weekend North on 1, 2 and 3 April 2023. The main themes were Magic and Witchcraft, partly inspired by organisers' Glen and Kerry Vaudrey finding an array of witch-charms in the nearby house they were moving into. Accordingly, a surprise appearance of the World's Greatest Magician was arranged: Sooty, together with his pal Sweep, waved from behind the stage curtains to the delight of the audience!

Ever-present, fez-tooned 'Barry Tadcaster' (aka Richard Freeman) welcomed speakers in his inimitable fashion, brandishing his array of 'talking' puppets. As has become customary, I opened proceedings. My talk described what has been the darkest and most difficult research that I have undertaken. It concerned the string of paranormal experiences of a mother-of-two, dating from when she was a child in Greater Manchester, and her subsequent discovery that her grandparents had been involved in Devil worship in the 1960s. Was it possible that this was linked to the phenomena? I illustrated the potential for black magicians to create tulpas to haunt people with an attested example involving a black dog.

Claire Davy then lightened the mood with a chatty worldwide tour of graveyards. She detailed the famous Chase Vault story from Barbados (FT385:44-49), before describing St John's Church, Boughton Green, as one of the most haunted cemeteries in England. You wouldn't want to meet the wraith of notorious highwayman 'Captain Slash', but there is another ghost which is presumed English because it only says one word: "Sorry". Crossing the globe,



Claire covered Argentina (La Recoleta), Romania (Merry Cemetery), London (Highgate, of course), Edinburgh (Greyfriars), the Czech Republic, Cuba, Australia and many in the USA (including Hollywood). Claire must have an understanding family, as she admits that when on holiday, her husband and kids head off to the waterpark while she seeks out local graveyards.

After lunch, Mark Olly set out a wide-ranging history of skulls – human and crystal – with some fantastic images and graphics. He described both tiny and giant heads from antiquity, raising the possibility there could have been a 'Lord of the Rings'-type world of hominids at some point in the past, with the extremes disappearing through evolution and interbreeding. Celts worshipped heads, and most ancient races believed the brain was the seat of a human soul; if you owned the head, then you owned the person. There were also some fascinating examples of people who could still function despite not having a brain. Mark finished by highlighting how quartz was the most common substance and discussed the Mitchell-Hedges Skull of Doom (FT237:28-35) and alien skulls.

Debora Moretti analysed archaeological and folkloric records relating to witches

Several audience members were adamant 'Emily' was a fake



in northern Italy. The word 'Masca' means a malevolent witch, spirit, or shadow of the dead. Arguably it evolved from ancient words relating to 'mask', with evidence from bog bodies pointing to funerary traditions of wrapping the dead in mesh/net to tie them down and prevent their return. It was commonly believed that witches flew across the sky to a Sabbat and they did this using ointments/oils made from fluids drawn from kidnapped children and stored in terracotta jars. Also, while asleep, witches could leave their bodies through their mouths as insects or small animals. Unfortunately, adulterous women would be

LEFT: Claire Davy, Barry Tadcaster (aka Richard Freeman) and Gef the Talking Mongoose in front of a full house.

considered witches and put to death by drowning.

Next, Richard Freeman detailed his latest trip to Sumatra in search of Orang Pendek and how his party explored a new part of the island and collected witness stories from locals. A footprint was found and a handprint suggested Orang Pendek was ground-based. There was a frustrating 'near-miss' when a (Skeletor-like) vocalisation was heard, which the guide said was Orang Pendek. Richard's colleague spotted something reddish-brown and about three feet (90cm) tall for a couple of seconds before it disappeared, leaving Richard poised with his camera, but too late. Successes included the team being the first Westerners to see some unique grave markers, and a very rare Sumatran Tiger caught by a camera trap.

After the main meal break, 'The Great Borrini' (aka Dr Matteo Borrini; see FT428:40-43) entertained the audience with a dazzling display of stage magic and mentalism wrapped around the theme of the Inquisition. This entailed panache, humour and detailed historical information about witches, torture and other related issues. Using a ring, he illustrated how Knights Templar would deliberately confuse inquisitors. Audience members were welcomed on stage with sharp spikes narrowly avoided, poisoned apples, mind-reading and a past-life regression. The finale had him foretell which of five 'witches' would be chosen by a random conference attendee to be the one saved from being burned at the stake! Comments from the audience included "Fantastic!" and "There's never been anything like it at any similar



conference!”

The first day closed with Nathan Jackson’s presentation on the little-discussed cryptozoological aspects of bears. He showed that if you go down to the woods today you may be in for a big (and nasty) surprise. There was a (potential) solution to what MacFarlane’s Bear, killed in 1864 and held at the Smithsonian, might actually be. He then took the audience on a trip across the seven continents, describing crypto-ursids both small and gigantic. No bears are found in Africa today, which wasn’t always the case. The Atlas bear was found in Morocco until the 19th century, but there are alleged sightings to this day.

Because of a late withdrawal by one speaker, I opened the second day with a talk about the ‘Brides on the Bridge’ (FT389:42-47) and asked if the photo of ‘Emily’ was a genuine photo of a ghost? ASSAP Chair CJ Romer added to the lively debate by describing how ‘ghost apps’ had become widely available and explained how even ‘experts’ struggle with alleged ghost photos. Several audience members were adamant ‘Emily’ was a fake, but I highlighted my understanding that the witness did not have the wherewithal to do this and he had never sought publicity or profit in the nine years since the photo was taken. I trusted his sincerity and CJ and I agreed to maintain an open mind.

Brian Hoggard’s well-illustrated and informative presentation explored a wide range of apotropaic practices over many centuries and cultures. He described curse dolls, written curses with mirror writing, witch bottles and various charms; and referenced an *Antiques Roadshow* where the presenter drank from a witch bottle thinking it was wine, when in fact it contained urine (FT392:10). Unofficial English saint John Schorne believed footwear could be used to trap Evil (FT425:66-68), reflecting the practice where well-worn shoes were concealed in



houses as a form of protection. Similarly, dead cats and horses’ skulls were found in house foundations and behind walls. Brian thought that this was because they would look very scary to any entities trying to enter the house.

There are over 50 locations around Scotland’s coast where sea serpents of many types have been seen since 1808: turtle-shaped, long-necked and many-humped. Unfortunately for monster-enthusiasts, Glen Vaudrey, who used to live in the Western Isles, was able to debunk virtually all of them. With his dry sense of humour he highlighted the best-known cases and proposed rational explanations: Sound of Soay (leather-back Turtle); Gourcock

ABOVE: The Great Borrini asks which witch should be saved from the flames.
LEFT: The controversial photo of ‘Emily’ by the bridge in Great Haywood.

(highly-decayed basking shark); Eriskay Water Horse (walrus); Lochalsh (a seal in periscope position); Butt of Lewis (remains of shipwreck seen at distance); and Sound of Sleet (a herd of cows swimming to fresh pasture). He added the key observation that no one ever sees the serpents’ bodies....

Steve Jones asked whether people knew of the parallels between Gardnerian Wicca practices and those of Masons? The first written reference to Masons was by Elias Ashmole (of Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum) who was initiated in nearby Warrington. Gerald Gardner was a Mason who adopted Naturism to deal with his asthma and became involved in Wicca when meeting practitioners at the Rosicrucian Theatre. A series of photos showed clear parallels, and Steve indicated how Gardner mimicked Masonic rituals, listing 13 similarities. Wicca is not an ancient religion, but it is the only one that Britain has given to the world.

The annual quiz featured questions on monsters, ghosts and UFOs, with Team 1 beating Team 2 by 7½ to 5 after a slow start. First prize was packs of

‘Cryptid Top Trumps’ with the runners-up receiving ‘Cryptid Colouring Books’. Richard Freeman then denounced over half of the creatures in each as not being actual cryptids!

The final talk saw David Adams reveal that he was ‘David Barton’ (FT371:40-44) and then detail his series of personal haunting experiences. A genuine raconteur, he described extremely bizarre events in an easy-going style, including disembodied hands, spectral old ladies and footsteps at midnight. Yet the only time he had ever been really scared was when he sensed something evil immediately in front of him when in his brother’s flat. He finished with a new story about a probable timeslip that had happened to him off Liverpool’s Bold Street, which is notorious for such phenomena (FT126:9, 382:40).

Glen Vaudrey deserves every plaudit for organising a sold-out WWN2023. He has since been busily preparing for 2024, with some excellent speakers already booked. Tickets are now on sale at www.weirdweekendnorth.com – you really do need to book early to avoid disappointment!

PHOTOS: STEVE ROBINSHAW

PAUL SIEVEKING joins the Palaeolithic dots and digs up the latest archaeological discoveries

CAVE DOTS DECIPHERED

Researchers had suspected for decades that the seemingly random dots and stripes on cave paintings across Europe held hidden meaning, but were unable to decipher it. Thanks to the work of a pioneering amateur, a London furniture conservator called Ben Bacon, over seven years the code has now been cracked. The first major revelation is that ancient people used the paintings to track the mating and birth times of wild animals such as cattle, horses, mammoths and fish, indicating when they were massed in large numbers and therefore easier to hunt.

Deciphering the markers pushes the date back 14,000 years to at least 20,000 years for the earliest known original. That suggests that writing was not a sudden invention necessitated by administration and bureaucracy in sophisticated societies, but something that was “far more deeply ingrained in human behaviour.” Ben Bacon spent years pondering dots and a distinctive Y symbol found on famous cave paintings at Lascaux in France and Altamira in Spain, and over 600 other sites. He felt this might be a symbol for “giving birth” because it showed one line growing out from another.

To crack the code, Bacon first enlisted the help of Tony Freeth, an honorary professor at University College London who previously led research that allowed the ancient Greek Antikythera mechanism, an astronomical clock, to be deciphered. “Lunar calendars are difficult because a year has almost twelve and a half lunar months and therefore does not fit exactly into one year. As a result, our own modern calendar has lost pretty much all connection with actual lunar months,” Prof Freeth said. The two men had to reconstruct a calendar based on meteorology and other information that Palaeolithic people would have had available, which then helped explain the universality of the cave symbols.

The duo were then able to use the birth cycles of equivalent animals alive today to find that the series of dots accompanying many animal drawings was a record of the lunar months when they mated. For example, in Spain, paintings of aurochs, wild ancestors of modern cattle, had four points. This indicated that they mated four months after the “bonne saison” or Palaeolithic spring. Prof Pettit and Prof Bob Kentridge, also in Durham, helped confirm the results by proving that there was almost no statistical chance that the results were random. By showing that the points were more than a simple count of, say, hunt kills, the research has revealed a much higher

level of thought among hunter-gatherers, Prof Pettit said. “It’s a fundamentally different thing [to a tally], when it says that this animal species will mate four lunar cycles after our agreed starting point... And that’s really a whole different league of thinking. It’s not just about making records, it’s a real conceptualisation of time,” he said. The team’s findings were published in the *Cambridge Archeological Journal*. *D.Telegraph*, via *Canada Today*; *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, 5 Jan; *Guardian*, 6 Jan 2023.

PALMYRA GOD

The identity of a mysterious ‘lord of the universe’ deity described in inscriptions from the ancient city of Palmyra, located in modern-day Syria, has long baffled scientists. But now, a researcher claims to have cracked the case. Palmyra existed for millennia and the city flourished around 2,000 years ago as a centre of trade that connected the Roman Empire with trade routes in Asia, such as the Silk Road. The anonymous deity is mentioned in numerous Aramaic inscriptions at Palmyra and is referred to as “he whose name is blessed forever”, “lord of the universe” and “merciful”, according to *Science in Poland*, a news site run by the Polish

government and independent journalists.

To solve this mystery, Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Wrocław in Poland, compared the inscriptions from Palmyra with inscriptions found throughout Mesopotamia that date to the first millennium BC. She discovered that the gods worshipped in Mesopotamia were referred to with similar names as the anonymous god from Palmyra. For example, “Bel-Marduk” – the supreme god of Babylon – was also referred to as “merciful”. The phrase “lord of the world” – a title similar to “lord of the universe” – was sometimes used to refer to the sky god Baalshamin.

Kubiak-Schneider told *Science in Poland* that the anonymous “god” mentioned in the Palmyra inscriptions is not a single god, but rather multiple deities that include Bel-Marduk and Baalshamin. She also contends that people refrained from mentioning the name of the deities as a sign of respect. Additionally, when people wrote the inscriptions invoking divine intervention, they were not always reaching out to a specific god but rather any god that would listen to their prayers. “There was no one anonymous god; every god who listened and showed favour to requests deserved an eternal praise,” Kubiak-Schneider said.

Some scholars reacted with caution to the hypothesis. One agreed that the unnamed deity likely refers to multiple deities, but was concerned that some of the Babylonian texts that Kubiak-Schneider studied dated centuries earlier than the inscriptions from Palmyra. *livescience.com*, 11 July 2022.

They found the series of dots was a record of the lunar months when the animals mated



ABOVE: An example of animal depictions associated with sequences of dots/lines: Aurochs, Lascaux.

OLDEST WRITTEN SENTENCE

An ivory comb, about the size of a child's thumb, found at Tel Lachish in southern Israel in 2017, bears a Canaanite inscription only noticed in 2022 when the object was being catalogued. The alphabet was invented around 1800 BC; the comb dates from 1700 BC, and probably came from Egypt (as there were no elephants in Canaan). The Canaanite alphabet is the foundation of all successive alphabetic systems, including Arabic, Greek and Latin. The inscription of 17 tiny letters, archaic in form and each only 2.5mm long, reads: "May this tusk root out the lice of the hair and the beard". Prof Yosef Garfinkel, head of the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said: "This is the first sentence ever found in the Canaanite language in Israel. It's a landmark in the history of the ability to write." The side of the comb, with six thick teeth, was used to untangle knots in the hair, while the other side, with 14 fine teeth, was used to remove lice and their eggs. The remains of a head louse were found on the second tooth when it was examined under a microscope.

The earliest confirmed systems of writing emerged around 3,200 BC, with cuneiform and hieroglyphics. These had hundreds of letters and were largely pictorial, making them difficult to learn, but they nevertheless spread across the Near East. Then around 1800 BC a new kind of writing appeared in the region that relied on only a few dozen letters that were repeated and shuffled around. Each letter related to a single basic sound or phoneme. Several centuries later, around 1,100 BC, the Canaanite script was adopted by the Phoenicians, who strictly wrote from right to left and standardised the shape of the letters. This then evolved into Old Hebrew, Old Aramaic, Ancient Greek and then Latin. *NY Times*, 7 Nov; *D.Telegraph*, 9 Nov; <i>10 Nov 2022.

SKULL COMB

Another comb, this one made from a human skull, was found by scientists from the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) among 280,000 items of interest collected between 2016 and 2018 during the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme. The ancient bone comb, dating



from the Iron Age (750 BC – AD 43), was found at Bar Hill, four miles (6.4km) north-west of Cambridge. Only two other comparable examples have ever been found in Britain – both within 15 miles (24km) of the Bar Hill Comb. One found in Earith in the 1970s featured carved teeth. The second was found in Harston Mill in the early 2000s.

Objects made from human bone may have been used in special rituals relating to the dead, but others were part of everyday life, including tools. "The Bar Hill Comb may have been a highly symbolic and powerful object for members of the local community," said Michael Marshall, the finds team lead. "It is possible it

LEFT: The ivory comb found at Tel Lachish. **BELOW LEFT:** The skull comb from Bar Hill, Cambridgeshire. **BOTTOM LEFT:** A mediæval ring that fetched £38,000 at auction.

was carved from the skull of an important member of Iron Age society whose presence was in some way preserved and commemorated through their bones." There was no evidence of wear on the comb teeth, suggesting it was never used as a functional item but the circular hole may have meant it was worn as an amulet. *BBC News*, 1 Mar 2023.

EARLY LAVATORY

Even older than the Chinese lavatory mentioned in the last archaeology column [FT431:14] is one discovered in Jerusalem dating back more than 2,700 years, when such an amenity would have been a rare luxury. It was designed for comfortable sitting, with a deep septic tank dug underneath. The smooth, carved limestone loo was found in a rectangular cabin that was part of a sprawling mansion in the Armon Hanatziv neighbourhood overlooking what is now the Old City. Inside the cabin were 30 to 40 bowls that may have held aromatic oils or incense – early air fresheners. *Times of Israel*, via *Smithsonian Magazine*, 5 Oct 2021.

MEDIAEVAL WEDDING RING

Metal detectorist David Board, 69, on the second day searching a field in Thorncombe, Dorset, in February 2019, unearthed a mediæval gold wedding ring that he initially thought was a sweet wrapper. The ring has a golden hoop of two entwined bands to symbolise marital union and an inverted diamond set into it. Inside the band is a mediæval French inscription that reads, "ieo vos tien foi tenes le moy" ("As I hold your faith, hold mine"). On 29 November 2022 it was sold by Noonans auction house in Mayfair, London, for £38,000.

Due to the location of the find and the quality of the ring, experts surmised that it's the wedding ring of Joan Brook, given to her by her husband, Sir Thomas Brook, Somerset's largest landowner. Their marriage in 1388 brought great wealth to the Brook family, as Joan was the widow of Robert Cheddar, a wealthy cloth merchant and twice mayor of Bristol. *Metro*, 14 Nov + 1 Dec; [CNN] 18 Nov; *BBC News*, 29 Nov 2022.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

284: CROWN HIM ONE

(Written before the royal 'do'. Won't be watching on telly. Clashes with my weekly Australian football match.)

Back in 1953, a group of us would-be Republicans opted out of the School's visit to a Lincoln cinema to watch the Coronation of QEII. Our punishment, inflicted by super-patriotic ex-commando Gym Master 'Sarge Perry', was to trim the cricket pitch with scissors.

From what I've gathered, the Coronation of Charlie Boy III is going to be a stripped-down affair, albeit his chosen ceremonial dish of quiche (I'd prefer his mam's Coronation Chicken), is a distinct improvement on Victoria's Brown Windsor Soup.

They used to say Real Men Don't Eat Quiche. But, Quiche Lorraine might be a better pet name for Camilla than Charles's 'Meboobah' (see YouTube clip)

(Personal Disclosure of no interest. Entering this world in 1937, I qualified for a Coronation Mug courtesy of The Stutterer's accession.)

Sounds like his crowning will be pretty small beer compared to ancient and some not-so-ancient ones. Mind you, Charlie will get off lightly compared to Egyptian pharaohs. He might have liked the Shemset Apron, a kind of kilt, being one who often sports that Scottish garb, but not the false beard made of goat hair (Queen Hapshetsut was thus adorned on her big day) or the bull's tail hanging from his belt, a supposed sign of strength. Also, his face and skin were painted brown, then he was handed symbolic shepherd's crook and fly-whip, after which he and his court had to perambulate the city.

He and the other English monarchs would have been more at home with the Hebrew coronations variously reported at 2 Kings 11:12 and 2 Chronicles 23: 2 where the seven-year-old Jehoash was crowned in the doorway of the Temple in Jerusalem where he was "led to his pillar as the custom was" and crowned whilst the people clapped their hands and shouted 'God Save The King' to the sound of trumpets.

Persian procedure sounds more of an ordeal. Plutarch (*Life of Artaxerxes* 3) describes how that royal had to consume a "frail of figs" (a rush basket containing a weight between 50-75 pounds), chew some turpentine wood, and wash it down with a cup of sour milk. Plus (adds Plutarch) "certain other rites unknown to all but



LEFT: The self-proclaimed Emperor of Central Africa Jean-Bédel Bokassa at his coronation in 1976.

those present".

By and large, Roman emperors, often acclaimed by the legions, wore a tiara if anything. Julius Caesar asked for and was granted the right to wear a laurel wreath to conceal his baldness; Caligula was likewise sensitive about his pate.

Nero (Tacitus, *Annals* bk15 ch29) was presumably making a point when he personally crowned Tiridates, pretender to the throne of Parthia.

Aurelian (AD 270-59) 'went Eastern' by being the first emperor to wear a golden, double-pointed diadem as part of his promoting worship of *Sol Invictus* (The Unconquerable Sun); cf. Sviatoslav Dmitriev, 'Tradition and Innovation in the Reign of Aurelian,' *Classical Quarterly* 54 (2004), 568-78.

Constantine 1 ('The Great') regularised this accoutrement – whatever happened to Christian humility? Before him, Diocletian (AD 285-305) had taken to wearing a golden, jewel-encrusted crown.

Byzantine emperors followed Constantine. At first, they were ceremonially crowned by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Later, they crowned themselves.

On Christmas Day AD 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne. This was in fact an illegal act, having no warrant from the Frankish king.

Most spectacular – it would make great television – was the accession of Julian (AD 361-3), hoisted on a shield, raised high, and acclaimed by his troops. Subsequently, he received a jewel-encrusted golden diadem, he like Aurelian being an ardent solar worshipper.

This would have been less practical with Queen Salote III of Tonga, crowd favourite of the 1953 Coronation, and spawner of a popular song by Edmondo Ros. She stood 6ft 3in (1.9m) tall and weighed in around 300lb (136kg). By delicious coincidence, the Tongan Crown is said to be the world's heaviest, weighing in at 3.3kg (7lb 4oz). Our late Queen complained of the weight of hers (1.28kg, 2lbs 13oz).

Coronations with crowns spread rapidly in the mediæval West, though it is worth remarking that Tancred of Bologna (=Tancredus, c. 1185-c.1230), Dominican preacher, stated that the only kings to be crowned and anointed were those of England, France, Jerusalem, and Sicily.

The ultimate in Coronations has to be that of Jean Bédel Bokassa in 1976, marking his new status as Emperor of Central Africa. An ephemeral one, to be sure. He was ousted two years later, brought to trial for cannibalism (claimed by his former chef) and the murder of children – he had 62 of his own, which might account for these infanticides... Consciously modelled on the Coronation of Napoleon, this fandango cost around 20 million American dollars, much of the expense borne by France, agreed to by President Giscard.

2,500 guests were invited – Charles has a list of 2,000, I read. Seated on a golden throne designed as an eagle with outstretched wings, Bokassa received a crown made by French jeweller Arthur Bertrand. It featured a golden outline map of Africa, eight outward pointing rays, and diamonds including one of 80 carats. Estimated costs for this, a separate one for his empress, and other accoutrements (sceptre, sword, etc.) ran to US\$5 million. The self-styled Emperor crowned himself, in predictable imitation of Napoleon.

For complete details of this extravaganza, see its Wikipedia notice (runs to 11 printed pages). I fancy even Meghan, *mutatis mutandis*, would not have gone to such lengths for her Harry...

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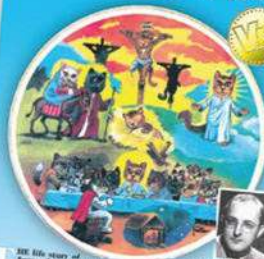
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The Ghosts of Sawston Hall

ALAN MURDIE goes in search of the stately ghosts of one of England's premier haunted houses



ABOVE: The main entrance of Sawston Hall, Cambridgeshire. **FACING PAGE:** A 1950s advertisement for Sawston Hall stressing its links with Mary Tudor.

Back in February, I attended the funeral of my cousin Stephen, held at St Mary's Church, Sawston, near Cambridge. Sadly, it was the second funeral at this ancient church for me in the last year, having previously attended in August 2022 that of his younger brother Ian who predeceased him.

Stephen was a shade eccentric, keen on tweed suits and a devotee of smoking pipe tobacco. A gentleman possessing firm opinions perhaps best fitted for another age, he had long deplored the decline of the country and considered the 2008 smoking ban in public places the worst restriction of civil liberties ever imposed upon a free people. But he enjoyed other pleasures in life, one being a love of Tudor history and another in living near the magnificent Sawston Hall, which lies just south of the church where I and the other mourners gathered.

The ashes of Stephen will eventually rest in the grave of his parents in the tranquil tree-edged churchyard, a quintessential English location where snowdrops herald spring and the church clock faithfully chimes the hours. Sawston Hall itself is not visible from the churchyard, as the

Practically every book on British ghosts refers to Queen Mary I haunting the Tapestry Room

trees encircle it in a thick wooded band; yet it remains an important presence in the village, and one that has shaped the history of both the church and the nation. It also ranks as one of the premier haunted houses in England, nearly as well-known as Borley, but one which few ghost hunters have visited in recent years. Its reputation stems from a lengthy history of ghostly experiences in the past and occasional investigations, some spiced with gently comic moments. Practically every book on British ghosts refers to the phantom of Queen Mary I (Mary Tudor, or 'Bloody Mary' – see pp. 40-43) haunting the Tapestry Room, which contains a bed in which she once slept.

The Hall was preserved over the generations by members of the Huddleston family who occupied it as their principal

home for nearly 500 years before selling up in 1981. It then became a language school for 20 years before being purchased by an Internet entrepreneur. He lost interest in it upon emigrating to Australia and sold it on as a private house in 2010.

Queen Mary came to Sawston for sanctuary during the unsettled days surrounding the death of her brother Edward VI in 1553. It was in his short reign that the Reformation intensified with the 'stripping of the altars' and removal of what was branded superstitious imagery from churches. The Duke of Northumberland then sought to usurp the Crown, by enthroning Lady Jane Grey, his 16-year-old daughter-in-law, and to continue the Protestant revolution.

Mary came to Sawston Hall to seek counsel and sanctuary from the strongly Catholic Huddleston family and it was here she learned of Northumberland's plot. Early on 8 July 1553 news reached the house of rebel troops approaching. Tradition avers Mary fled, disguised as a dairy maid, her party heading off to Norfolk to rally supporters. At a safe distance they momentarily reined their horses and looked back to see the hall on fire. "Let it burn,"

she declared, "For when I am Queen, I will build Huddleston a finer house."

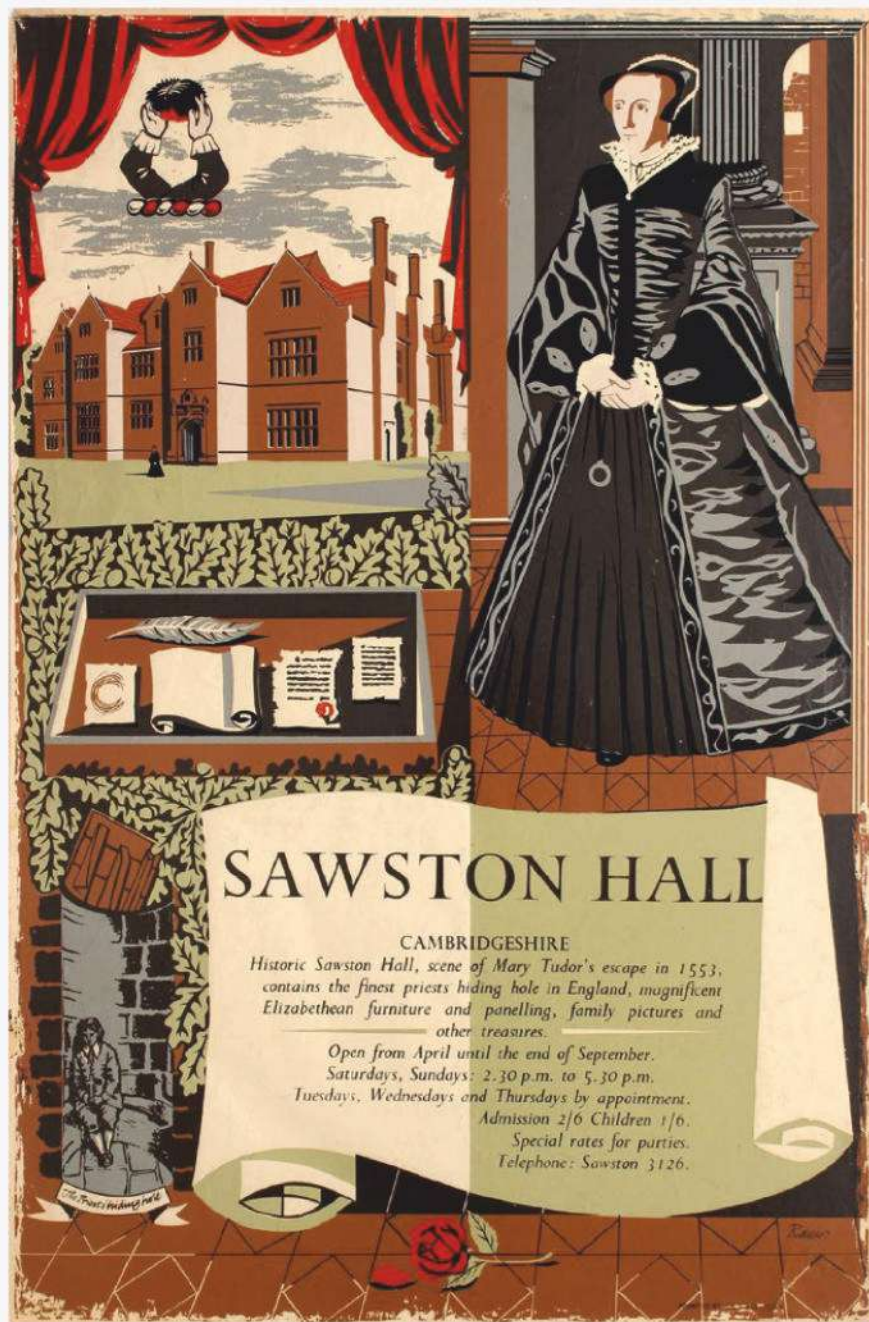
She kept her word. The reign of Lady Jane Grey was the shortest in royal history, lasting nine fleeting days until she was overthrown, arrested and executed (her ghost reputedly haunts the Tower of London and Bradgate Park, Leicestershire). With Mary becoming the first woman to hold the English Crown since Empress Matilda in the 12th century, Sawston Hall was rebuilt with stones removed from Cambridge Castle. But Mary reigned just five years, and was succeeded by her Protestant half-sister Elizabeth. Sawston Hall remained largely unaltered thereafter, for the Huddlestons as faithful Catholics faced persecution and steadily increasing penalties as Protestantism returned. With their fortunes declining, the Huddlestons could not afford any alterations beyond constructing priest-holes for hiding their confessors, but they retained the house.

From 1657 the house and estate descended down the male line, inherited from father to son for nearly 200 years until Richard Huddleston died aged 79 in 1857. It then passed to the line of his brother Edward.

Stories of a 'Grey Lady' apparently circulated privately during Victorian times, but the first public airing of manifestations at Sawston Hall came in 1930. Mrs Clare Eyre-Huddleston, who married Captain Reginald Eyre-Huddleston the same year, heard notes from a spinet (a keyboard instrument popular during Tudor times) playing inside the building, as did some friends. She obviously enjoyed a sensitive musical ear: there was a harpsichord in the Hall, but she insisted the tone was lighter, and that she could distinguish between the two. Captain Eyre-Huddleston was sceptical, but allowed these experiences to become public knowledge. Another story avers other ghostly music heard is from a virginal (an instrument similar to a spinet), with tradition claiming Queen Mary played one the evening before her flight.

In 1960 the *Cambridge Evening News* quoted Mrs Fuller, the cook, about seeing a silent ghost drifting through one room. She told ghost hunter Peter Underwood she thought it was Queen Mary and consequently she would "never spend a night in the house" (*The Gazetteer of British Ghosts*, 1971).

Over 30 years, Captain Eyre-Huddleston had found his scepticism eroded and he was agreeable to receiving a visit from celebrity clairvoyant Tom Corbett, shadowed by journalist and writer Diana Norman, then embarking on a tour of haunted stately homes. Corbett, an antiques dealer from Bileston, Suffolk, must have been in his element when spending a night



in Mary's bed in the Tapestry Room. He was repeatedly awakened by the irregular performance of his alarm clock sounding prematurely three times. He sensed this was down to a night-watchman "protecting the rooms he knows", possibly called "Cutlass" or something similar. Later Clare Eyre-Huddleston discovered a family named Cutress living in Sawston village. In contrast, nothing happened to Diana Norman when sleeping in the Panelled Room, also reputedly haunted. Overall, it seems Corbett, who possessed considerable personal charm, rather impressed the Huddlestons. He was given a return invitation to conduct a special evening of clairvoyant readings at

Sawston Hall for the public, which attracted many people from the village. This led to a surreptitious test of his abilities by Cambridge ghost hunter Tony Cornell (1923-2010), the President of the Cambridge University Society for Psychical Research (CUSPR).

Meanwhile, the alleged sightings were reviewed by Dennis Bardens for his book *Ghosts and Hauntings* (1965). He noted those who believed they glimpsed Queen Mary's ghost made identical comments: firstly, that she was wearing the same dress depicted in her portrait hanging at Sawston Hall; secondly, she held a prayer book in a way which displayed her beautiful hands, of which she was excessively proud; and,



GHOSTWATCH

thirdly, she was smiling – contrary to her portrayals by artists, which usually show her with a solemn countenance. Perhaps this was because Sawston Hall was a house where in treacherous times she always experienced friendship and happiness, having visited on several occasions prior to the dramatic July night when she was forced to flee.

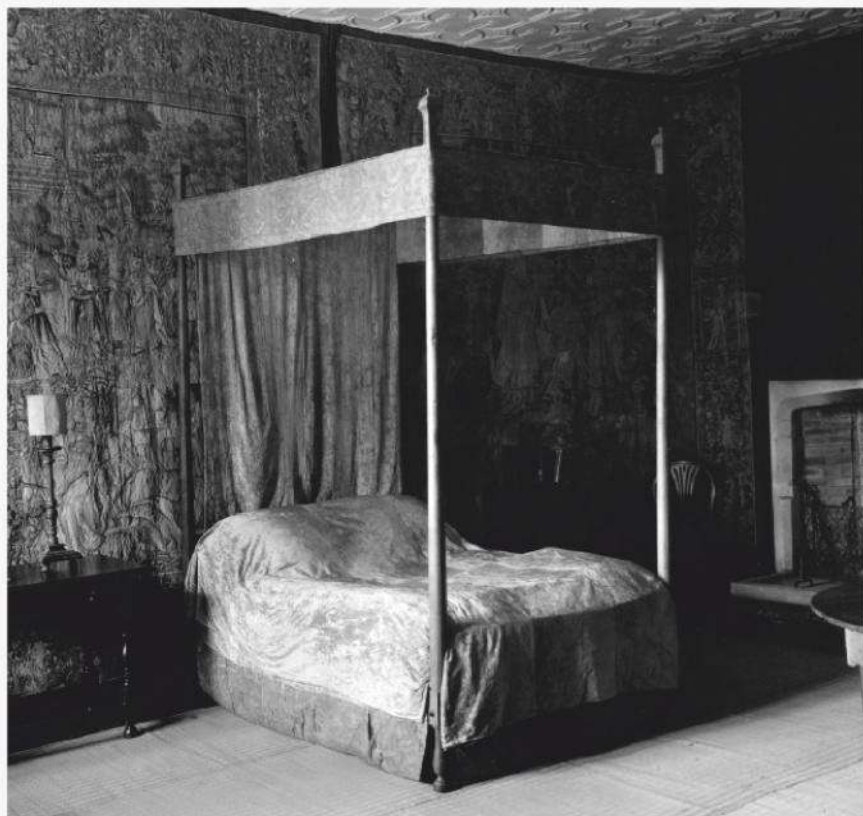
This impression of a happy presence was shared by the erudite ghost hunter Joan Forman. Although never proclaiming herself a psychic, she was a woman of pronounced intelligence and sensitivity and receptive to atmospheres. She was smitten by the warmth the building radiated within its Great Hall, but noted a “chilly air” inside the Tapestry Room. After locating first-hand witnesses to phenomena among hall staff, Forman turned in a favourable verdict on the haunting in her *Haunted East Anglia* (1974).

However, regarding Corbett’s psychic claims, Tony Cornell nursed suspicions. Tony told me in June 2004 that, prior to the public exhibition of Corbett’s faculties, he decided to stage a test of his own. He sent the clairvoyant a letter saying that although not able to attend the night in person, he had heard of a particular (fictitious) ghost walking the hall, which he detailed. He signed this letter ‘Mr Pepper’ (a nod to the ‘Pepper’s Ghost’ stage illusion; see **FT400:16**). Cornell’s ‘ghost’ was completely made up. The following week he attended the evening at Sawston Hall under his own name and heard Tom Corbett deliver a ‘reading’ in which he purported to pick up details of Cornell’s invented ghost! Understandably, Cornell became sceptical about Corbett’s claims, but did not expose him.

Unfortunately, Cornell himself failed to gain permission to mount a ghost vigil deploying equipment, as the Huddlestons were not minded to encourage scientific investigation. Perhaps Corbett had picked up on the ruse, or possibly as Catholics the family were happier with spiritual interpretations of their phenomena rather than physics-orientated ones, or perhaps by this stage they were just fed up with ghost hunters.

It was not until the Huddlestons left that an opportunity for Cornell to investigate arose. The four-poster bed in which Mary slept caught the imagination of Roger Clarke after seeing a photograph in *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* issued by Readers Digest (1973; see **FT427:28-35**). Roger approached Sawston Hall and obtained permission to stay overnight at the house, and he invited along the enthusiastic Tony Cornell and some CUSPR colleagues.

On the night of 5 February 1983, Clarke, Cornell and two other investigators from



PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Tony Cornell slept in the bed for about three hours and Roger Clarke for half an hour

the CUSPR – R Loosemore and T Clark – stayed at Sawston Hall, being locked inside the building from 8pm to 8am the next morning.

Their vigil commenced at midnight; efforts focused upon the Long Gallery, the Tapestry Room and the haunted bed itself. Tony Cornell slept in it for about three hours and Roger Clarke for half an hour. Both heard taps and knocks, “resembling the sound of central heating pipes being hit with a hard object”, sounds also heard by the watchers in the Long Gallery. At 3am, after Sawston church clock struck the hour, the three chimes of the bell were followed, as if in imitation, by a trio of metallic taps like those heard earlier.

After this all four investigators remained in the Tapestry Room to sleep. At about 5am, noises were heard by Roger Clarke, who switched on his tape recorder. A couple of quieter knocks were picked up, but the predominant noises captured were snores from the other three sleeping investigators!

Also heard were rhythmic raps occurring in five small groups separated by a few

ABOVE: The Tapestry Room, showing the haunted bed in which Queen Mary Tudor slept on the night of July 7th 1553, when evading capture by supporters of Lady Jane Grey.

seconds, with the loudness progressively increasing and ending with one pronounced knock.

Upon playing back the tape, a few seconds of music had also been recorded, very faintly. One investigator thought it resembled a recorder consort (a small group of players). A random pick-up of a radio signal was suspected. Roger Clarke, in his 2012 book *The Natural History of Ghosts* (see **FT400:55**), states later sonic analysis of the taps and raps recorded showed an unusual acoustic signature, but the tape has unfortunately been lost.

As was conceded at the time, there were flaws in the methodology adopted, with people being left alone at certain points. This is the ‘large site’ problem faced wherever there are insufficient investigators to cover a sizeable building. A follow-up investigation on 25 March 1983 involved 11 investigators, divided into four teams, each possessing at least one camera, a torch, a tape recorder, thermometer and a notepad. The Chapel and Tapestry Room were continually monitored and a corridor off the Long Gallery was covered by an infra-red beam. Regrettably, “no event of any significance occurred during the vigil”. (*Journal of the SPR* vol 52, 1983-84, 757)



LEFT: Ghost hunters assemble in *The Legend of Hell House*. ABOVE: Sawston Hall in *The Nightcomers*. BELOW: Tom Corbett in the 1965 TV film *The Stately Ghosts of England*.

In October 1984, reporter Carmel Fitzsimons of the *Cambridge Evening News* stayed at Sawston Hall for a Hallowe'en feature. She saw no ghosts, slept badly and caught flu.

In 1995 Robert Huddleston of North Carolina, a distant American relation of the Sawston Huddlestons, came visiting. Perhaps rather oblivious to the march of time, he presumed he would be greeted by Captain Eyre-Huddleston, but arrived to find the Captain had died in 1970 and the Hall had been turned over to a language school 14 years earlier. Nonetheless, he returned the following year, and was allowed to sleep in the haunted bed and sit inside the priest hole. In 2007 he sent Sawston History Society an illustrated DVD talk on "The Huddlestons of Sawston Hall", originally given by him at Carolina Meadows, a retirement community in North Carolina, in 2005. While showing a picture of Mary's famous bed, in the recording he commented about the rumour of the Hall being haunted. A few seconds later, "almost subliminally", viewers among the Sawston History Society spotted a mysterious figure flitting across the screen. Could this be an example of a ghost captured on film, a society member wondered?

Not much has been heard of ghosts thereafter, with the Hall returning to private hands. In 2010 it was sold to a hedge fund manager, a Mr Stephen Coates, who denied any haunting, blaming the Internet for its reputation along with "a whole community of people who make up stories". When in

2013 the Coates family put the building up for sale with a price tag of £4.75 million, he told the *Cambridge Evening News*: "If you bought a house in Trumpington Meadows and hear a door rattle, you just say 'Oh, there's a bit of a gale'. Here, everyone immediately thinks 'Oh my gosh, Queen Mary's stalking the place!' That's how I look at it anyway." (17 October 2013). More recently the Hall has been used for functions held by the High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire, and Prime minister Rishi Sunak visited in July 2022 to rally a meeting of Cambridgeshire Conservatives (*Cambridge Independent*, 29 July 2022).

This lovely building also has several ghostly cinematic associations. Back in the 1960s the British Travel and Holidays Association were keen on promoting 'Haunted England'. They sponsored Candy Scott, a model and film actress, to sleep in the Tapestry Room. Candy saw nothing but felt icy winds and heard noises, including doors opening and closing, convincing her the house was haunted.

An altogether more indirect connection was Diana Norman herself being

married to Barry Norman, who hosted the long-running Film... programme on BBC 1 between 1972 and 1998.

The most significant association arose in 1971 when Sawston Hall was used in filming *The Nightcomers*. Directed by Michael Winner, the film starred Marlon Brando and Stephanie Beecham, its story being conceived as a prequel to the psychological ghost story *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. It re-imagined the

children of the story being corrupted by witnessing a sadomasochistic relationship between the two servants who later return to haunt them as ghosts. During the making of the film, two security officials employed by the film-makers heard the sounds of what was interpreted as a mass being held in the Chapel.

Clashes between mediums and sceptics and the deployment of gadgetry and equipment in a large rambling mansion all bring to mind what, in my opinion, remains the best haunted house film ever made, *The Legend of Hell House* (1973). It stars Pamela Franklin, Clive Revill and Roddy McDowell.

Critic Philip Halliwell gave *The Legend of Hell House* one star out of four in his *Film Goer's Companion*, describing it as a scarier version of the 1963 film *The Haunting*, a largely psychological thriller (one I always find curiously depressing rather than frightening). I get the impression Halliwell didn't like many films of any sort made after about 1960.

By contrast, the manifestations depicted in *The Legend of Hell House* are presented as objectively and unambiguously real. The investigators are rocked by a series of increasingly hair-raising phenomena drawn from the literature of physical seances and violent poltergeist outbreaks, albeit greatly scaled up in terms of destructive and injurious impact. Mercifully, outside of folklore, only a tiny fraction of ghosts and poltergeists have ever been reported as proving physically harmful to anyone.

And what is the connection with Sawston Hall, you might wonder? Well, recently re-watching *The Legend of Hell House* at a special screening, I noticed the name credited as consultant on the film is none other than Tom Corbett...





STRANGE CONTINENT | ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the weird news from Europe, from not-penguins to not-pagans...

EXTREMES OF SKY AND EARTH

Turmoil on Earth means turmoil in the heavens, or so the ancients believed. We have a fair share of turmoil down here – strikes in Germany, riots in France, war in Ukraine – and we’ve had our fair share of strangeness above our heads in the last few months. At the end of February, green and red northern lights flickered over Brandenburg in Northern Germany and Saharan sand rained down on first Spain, then Bavaria, southern Germany, around 22 February. The earthquake in Turkey and Syria was said to have been accompanied by earthquake lights, although no particular description or further information was given. *morgenpost.de*, 27 Feb; *allgaeuerzeitung.de*, 23 Feb; *daswetter.com*, 8 Feb 2023.

Drought saw rivers completely dry out in France, such as the Issole in the Département Var, and whole reservoirs in the Pyrenees were reduced to only 20 per cent of their usual volume, while in Venice, some of the minor canals dried up due to atmospheric pressure and the water level of Lake Garda sank until the Isola di San Biagio was joined with the shoreline by a raised path, and tourists flocked to the island on dry land. On 16 March, the waters of a canal at Borgofrancone, at the northern end of Lake Como, suddenly turned bright red. This was not due to algal growth, as usual, but to a spillage of 200 litres of a red liquid, probably a dye, in a nearby industrial area. *merkur.de*, 23 Feb; *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 24 Feb, 10 Mar; *laprovinciadilecco.it*, 18 Mar 2023.

PHANTOMS OF SKY AND WATER

A mysterious “phantom boat” – although not of the ghostly



ABOVE: The lonely Zurich ‘penguin’ – yes, it’s a cormorant.

variety – was reported floating on Lake Starnberg, Bavaria. When water police discovered it drifting in a bay, it had already been completely stripped. A similar case, in Berlin, was also reported as “phantom boat”. After a storm, a driverless houseboat crashed into a jetty on the Dahme River at Treptow-Köpenick. It was found that the wind had freed the 23m (75ft) boat from its mooring – so no real mystery here. *radiogong.de*, 7 Dec 2022; *bz-berlin.de*, 6 Feb 2023.

During the scare about “unidentified objects” over the US in mid-February, a similar incident was reported from Romania. On 14 February, the Romanian Air Force sent two MiG 21 LanceR jets to southeast Romania where a “floating object” had been observed at a height of 11,000 m (35,000ft). The jets, however, found no trace of the “weather balloon-like object” when they arrived at the site, despite searching for half an hour and using their radar. *iflscience.com*, 15 Feb 2023.

Police and fire workers

“It was all alone and seemed to be looking for something”

searched the lower reaches of the river Sieg, near Bonn, Germany, for several hours on 12 January 2023 after a witness reported a man in flashy clothing floating in the water at 4.40 pm. The river was in spate, and a helicopter and police in a dinghy searched a stretch of 10km (six miles) but could find no trace of any person in need, only a construction worker’s helmet. In the following days, no sign that any person had drowned came to light and the river was in flood due to heavy rains. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 13 Jan 2023.

ICE FALLS

Last year saw a few ice falls. On 13 July 2022, at 10.30am in the village of Casagalvana, Italy, citizens stared into the

sky to see a large cryptometeor shooting down at them, finally crashing on the tarmac. One child, a boy who was only a few metres from the impact site, was bruised by splinters of ice, and received the shock of his life. *radiobruno.it*, 15 July 2022.

During the night of 17-18 December 2022, Hanna Binz and Nicole Kindermann and their families in Tawern, near the border between Germany and Luxemburg, were frightened by a loud noise – and found that a clear block of ice the size of a soccer ball had crashed on the street, leaving a circle of smaller ice pieces within a 10m (33ft) radius. *volksfreund.de*, 21 Dec 2022.

I did a search for other recent ice falls in European countries, but this seems to have been the only one – except that I uncovered about half a dozen cases in Germany and Spain of people deliberately throwing blocks of ice from motorway bridges to attack cars!

BIRDING FAIL

At noon on 5 January, Sarah, a 32-year-old Swiss woman walking by the Limmat River that runs through Zurich, spotted a strange bird in the water. She quickly snapped a picture with her mobile phone and sent it to the local newspaper. “It looked strange, much larger than any bird I know,” she said. “Also, it was all alone and seemed to be looking for something.” Sarah said she had lived in Zurich all her life and had never seen anything like this creature. She thought it might have been a penguin. The enigma, however, was soon cleared up when Livio Rey, a biologist of the Sempach ornithological station, was shown the picture. It was – as anyone can see – a cormorant, a bird as common on Lake Zurich as anywhere in Europe where there is water. *20min.ch*, 5 Jan 2023.



THE HARZ WOLF MAN

On 25 March, police in the German Harz Mountains received a strange emergency call. An observer phoned to report an explosive flame in a forest – and a “wolf man” standing next to it. Police went to investigate, but found only a small fire at the site. However, they were not surprised by the report as such, as it was nothing new to police and the fire brigade. “This person has been with us for at least five years. There have repeatedly been sightings of a person dressed in a wolf’s pelt or wolf costume and rumours have it that someone supposedly lives here in the forest,” explained Alexander Beck, head of the Blankenburg Fire Brigade. This time, he said, the emergency service had even spotted the “wolf man” fleeing the fire site. Officials assume that the man is a drop-out from society and have encountered signs of him for several years – professionally made fires and makeshift huts constructed from tree branches. Beck said: “We have someone here who understands a lot about living rough and can also adapt to the changing seasons.” However, he expressed concern about the danger of forest fires near Regenstein Castle where most encounters have been reported. *Volksstimme*, 31 Mar 2023; *netzwerk-kryptozoologie.de*.

ANIMAL ‘ATTACKS’

A forest worker was ‘attacked’ by a wolf in the mountains north of Nice, France. The man was on a narrow mountain path when he was confronted by a pack of five wolves. One of the animals behaved quite aggressively and tried to shoo the man away. However, it did not attempt to bite him, as a spokesperson for the Département Alpes-de-Haute-Provence explained. The forest worker drove the wolf away by shouting and making threatening gestures, and then the other wolves followed it. This was the first “confrontation” of man and

wolf since the return of the species to France in 1990. The French Department for Biodiversity (OFB) concluded that the wolf had felt threatened and had only tried to find a way out on the rocky bottleneck. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 18 Feb 2023.

On 19 March, a ‘goat’ stopped a train running between Körle and Baunatal-Guntershausen in northern Hesse, Germany. It stood on the rails, forcing the train driver to stop. When police arrived it was found the goat was in fact a sheep, and it took them two hours to remove the uncooperative animal from the tracks so that train services could resume. Some 20 hours earlier, in the same region of Hesse, a train hit a beaver between Gensungen and Brunslar near Felsberg. The driver stopped the train, and the dead animal was recovered. The track had to be closed down for more than an hour. *hna.de*, 20 Mar 2023.

PAGAN PLANKS

Now for something completely different. For many years, Polish archaeologists proudly presented roughly carved wooden idols as “masks used in mediaeval Slavic rites”. The masks were discovered at an excavation of a mediaeval fortress at Opole, in Silesia, between 1959 to 1962, and were interpreted as evidence of a pagan survival well into Christian times (possibly because the Communist regime loathed Christianity and friendship with Russia called for an emphasis on common Slavic and pagan origins). It was claimed that the masks, from the third quarter of the 11th century, resembled ancient Slavic gods and must have persisted and even been used in rites that were only superficially Christian. Modern pagans happily used replicas of the masks in their rituals. In 2021, Kamil Kajkowski, an archaeologist of the West Kashubian Museum in Bytów, Poland, decided to have a second look. All the masks had



ABOVE: One of the long-misidentified ‘mediaeval masks’ supposedly used in Slavic pagan rites and its probable, and more mundane, origins.

a kind of roughly indicated nose; but, he discovered, these were simply tunnels made by bark beetles. Also, there was no indication of any holes for cords or strings to hold the “masks” in place in front of the wearer’s face. Kajkowski also discovered that the three holes bored into the wooden planks of the “masks” in a triangle formation which had been thought to represent the eyes and the mouth could as well have been simply holes for wooden nails. He concluded that the “pagan masks” were probably everyday objects, possibly just parts of a stool or a rocking horse. *haaretz.com*, 1 Feb 2023.

ROOS ON THE RUN

Kangaroo escapees are regularly reported, especially in Germany (I have found no recent accounts from any other country). In mid-November 2022, a roo escaped from the

Arche Noah Zoo at Grömitz on the Baltic coast after a storm damaged its pen. Early in January 2023, another one ran away from a private Zoo at Freudenberg, Northrhine-Westfalia, but was caught soon after and brought back to its cage. A roo called Amy, with a baby in its pouch, fled its owner at Meilitz, Thuringia, in mid-January, and was still at large two weeks later. Another roo has been seen regularly for several years in the Eifel Mountains southwest of Cologne, and new observations were logged late in January near Knaufspesch. And in late January, a roo escaped a private owner at Uetze, near Hanover in Lower-Saxony. Police searched for it using thermal imaging cameras, but could not trace it. *Lübecker Nachrichten*, 25 Nov 2022; *SWR.de*, 9 Jan; *MDR.de*, 20+27 Jan; *volksfreund.de*, 24 Jan; *kreiszeitung.de*, 31 Jan 2023.

ECHOES OF THE BUNNY MAN

Has the rabbit-suited, axe-wielding maniac of 1970s urban legend returned?



ABOVE: Colchester Overpass, Fairfax County, Virginia, now better known as 'Bunny Man Bridge'. BELOW: Contemporary newspaper reports of the Robert Bennett and Paul Phillips Bunny Man encounters in October 1970. OPPOSITE: *Bunnyman*, a 2011 horror film.

Since the mid-1970s the urban legend of the Bunny Man of Clifton Bridge has been circulating, telling of an axe murderer dressed in a bunny costume who killed two children and left their bodies hanging from a covered bridge in Virginia. The story has grown in the telling and has gone on to inspire at least one horror film series as well as being the likely inspiration for the sinister rabbit man in the deeply fortean 2001 film *Donnie Darko*, but does have its roots in real incidents that took place in Fairfax County, Virginia, in 1970.

The Bunny Man made his first appearance in October 1970. Air force cadet Robert Bennett was sitting with his fiancé in a car on Guinea Road, Fairfax, when a man "dressed in a white suit with long bunny ears" ran out of the bushes and shouted: "You're on private property and I have your tag number." He then threw a wooden-handled hatchet through the right front car window before vanishing again. Neither Bennett nor his fiancé were harmed, but they reported the incident to the police, who kept the hatchet. Two weeks later, the Bunny Man

Man in Bunny Suit Sought in Fairfax

Fairfax County police said yesterday they are looking for a man who likes to wear "white bunny rabbit costume" and throw hatchets through car windows. Hoo-est.

Air Force Academy Cadet Robert Bennett told police that shortly after midnight last Sunday he and his fiancée were sitting in a car in the 5400 block of Guinea Road when a man "dressed in a white suit with long bunny ears" ran from nearby bushes and shouted: "You're on private property and I have your tag number."

Then the "rabbit" threw a wooden-handled hatchet through the right front car window, the first-year cadet told police.

As soon as he threw the hatchet, the "rabbit" skipped off into the night, police said. Bennett and his fiancée were not injured.

Police say they have the hatchet, but no other clues in the case. They say Bennett was visiting an uncle, who lives across the street from the spot where the car was parked. The cadet was in the area to attend last weekend's Air Force-Navy football game.

The 'Rabbit' Reappears

A man wearing a furry rabbit suit with two long ears appeared—again—on Guinea Road in Fairfax County Thursday night, police reported, this time wielding an ax and chopping away at a roof support on a new house.

Less than two weeks ago a man wearing what was described as a white rabbit suit accused two persons in a parked car of trespassing and heaved a hatchet through a closed window of the car at 5400 Guinea Rd. They were not hurt.

Thursday night's rabbit, wearing a suit described as gray, black and white, was spotted a block away at 5307 Guinea Rd.

Paul Phillips, a private security guard for a construction company, said he saw the "rabbit" standing on the front porch of a new, but unoccupied house.

"I started talking to him," Phillips said, "and that's when he started chopping."

"All you people trespass around here," Phillips said the "rabbit" told him as he whacked eight gashes in the pole. "If you don't get out of here, I'm going to bust you on the head."

Phillips said he walked back to his car to get his

head!" before running off into the woods.

In the weeks that followed the press reports of these incidents, more than 50 people claimed to have seen the Bunny Man, including one man who alleged that the Bunny Man had eaten his cat. Despite a police investigation and a mysterious phone call from someone identifying himself as "The Axe Man" complaining about trespassing, the Guinea Road Bunny Man was never caught, but over time became immortalised in urban legend as a bunny-suited escaped lunatic axe murderer. Now, though, in the run-up to Easter, the Singular Fortean Society,

based in Madison, Wisconsin (see FT428:38), has collected several even stranger Bunny Man sightings of a less obviously human nature.

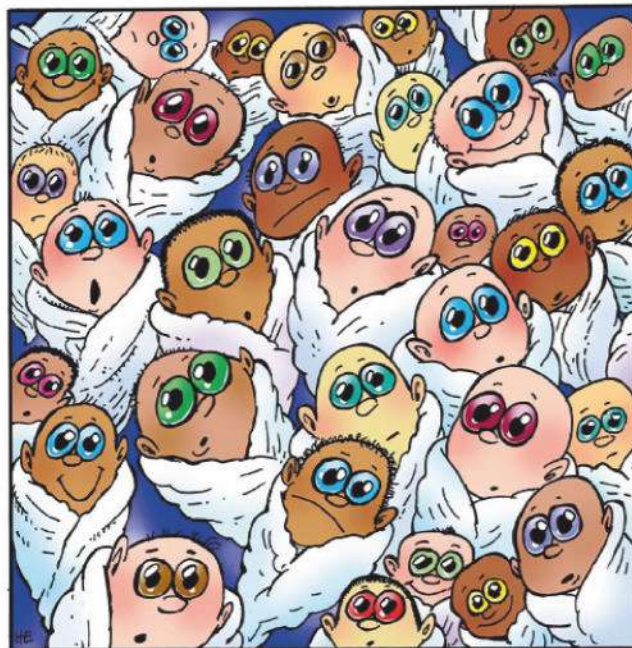
The first was received in January 2022 from someone who requested anonymity and related an incident from Easter of either 1999 or 2000, when they were around seven years old. "I remember it was Easter morning," wrote the witness. "I was on the floor of my parents' living room watching some Easter special, playing with whatever new toy I got in my Easter basket, and feasting upon chocolate goodies. I can clearly remember not hearing any sort of sound or something that would draw my attention, yet I looked out the sliding glass door of the living room that went to the fenced-in backyard... As I looked out the sliding glass door, I saw a flash of colour. I distinctly remember white and blue and purple. I got up and looked out the window and saw something I'll never forget. Jumping over the fence into our backyard was a six-to-seven-foot-tall [183-213cm] rabbit-man. It had the face of a rabbit with those cold darting eyes and twitching nose. Ears up and tall. White to cool blue/purple colouring in the fur. It didn't have an Easter basket or anything funny like that. It stood on two legs which were flat like a rabbit's hind legs with large powerful haunches. I don't remember what exactly the arms looked like, but I remember it held them close to its body. It jumped over the fence from the neighbour's house and landed in our yard. I stood there in awe as this thing hopped across the back yard. It stood for a second and looked at me and proceeded to jump over the adjacent fence into the next neighbour's yard. That was the last I saw of it."

Tobias Wayland of the Singular Fortean Society scheduled a follow-up call with the witness, but they cancelled at short notice and have not responded to any attempts to contact them since.

More than 50 people claimed to have seen the Bunny Man

reappeared on Guinea Road, and this time was seen furiously hacking away at the roof supports of a newly built house with a long-handled axe, wearing a grey, black and white rabbit suit. Challenged by security guard Paul Phillips, the Bunny Man shouted, "All you people trespass around here, you don't get out of here, I'm going to bust you on the

268: BABY BLUES



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

All human babies have blue eyes when they are just born, no matter what colour their eyes end up being in later life.

The “truth”

In 2016 a study by Stanford University into “iris colour at birth” found that 63% of the newborns examined had brown eyes. Blue was in second place with 20.8%. So where does the strange belief come from that all baby eyes are blue? One possible hint lies in the fact that blue birth eyes are much more prevalent in Caucasians than in other groups; is this a myth only found in majority-Caucasian communities? The colour of human irises can (but doesn’t always) change during the first year or so of life, depending on how much melanin each individual produces, and the final colour can’t be predicted with complete confidence as it depends on too many variables. And incidentally, contrary to another popular belief, two brown-eyed parents can produce a blue-eyed child. Blue eyes are in any case one of those newfangled inventions so annoying to traditionalists: it’s thought that the mutation which makes them possible only arose between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago.

Sources

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4956505/; www.healthline.com/health/all-babies-are-born-with-blue-eyes#eye-color-stats; www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Newborn-Eye-Color.aspx

Disclaimer

Do let us know if we’ve got anything wrong. To be fair, it’s hard reading medical journals through these purple contact lenses.

Mythchaser

People who go running for the purpose of keeping fit or competitively, rather than simply because the pubs are about to close, are often told that they shouldn’t drink coffee before they run as it will “dehydrate them.” A reader wants to know whether there is any evidence for or against this prohibition. (He admits he’s hoping it turns out to be true, because he’s running out of excuses to avoid his theoretically daily exercise.)



When posted on the Singular Fortean’s website, this prompted a response from an Illinois woman who gave her name as Sharon and told them of her own experience. “It was just after sun-up, Easter morning 1961 or 1962... I was eight or nine years old and knew there were two Easter bunnies called Mom and Dad... I woke up that morning just as it started to get light and decided to check out the Easter baskets for my little sister and me. They were on the coffee table in the den, I sat on the couch and began inspecting the baskets, when I saw something unusual in our back yard. I could hardly miss it because it was in direct line of sight with the baskets and it was big. It was a six-foot-tall [183cm], white, bipedal rabbit wearing a black vest embroidered with little glass beads of all colours (or so it seemed). It was about 15 feet [4.5m] from the house, facing away from it, so I saw it in profile. It was standing still next to our seven-foot-tall [213cm] blue spruce tree, about 25 to 30 feet [7.6-9m] away from me, for maybe half a minute, long enough for me to get a good look at it. It never looked in my direction; it took a short step before it hopped like a kangaroo, but with shorter hops, and each hop was double the speed of the last, and the rabbit quickly became a white and black blur and vanished before it would have hit the back fence... Even after 60 years, the picture in my brain is 3D real – the grass, the needles on the blue spruce, and the snow-white fur and big, shiny, black eyes of the bunny,” she said. Sharon also provided a crude photoshop illustration of what she experienced.

In turn, Sharon’s report prompted a retired Canadian police officer, who again requested anonymity, to submit his own Bunny Man experience. It took place just before 7am on Easter morning in 1988, in

Crofton, British Columbia, when he was 11 years old.

“I was looking out my bedroom window across my back yard with a backdrop of a forest,” he said. “I had a rabbit cage at the border to the forest adjacent to our work shed, roughly 40 feet [12m] away. I witnessed a six-foot-tall [1.8m] white rabbit with a dark vest facing the door to my pet rabbit’s cage. I went into shock, as I was beginning to be sceptical of such things as the Easter Bunny as I was aging out of the concept. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I maintained a visual of the rabbit and pinched and slapped myself so hard to try and wake myself up. The pain confirmed I was not dreaming. I rubbed my eyes; the giant rabbit was still there. I threw open the single pane window which led to the back yard facing the rabbit cage. I yelled at the rabbit, ‘Hey, I see you!’ I tried to volley up into the window to leap out and run to the rabbit, (in my tighty whitey kids’ underwear) but couldn’t make it up out the window. It turned, looked at me, and took a series of bounds at high speed into the forest. I called my little brother, and he had arrived at the window as the giant rabbit disappeared into the Douglas firs. I woke my parents and even a neighbour. I quizzed them as to a possible Easter

costume, but I knew no one could make leaps at that speed nor have such a detailed costume, and why run for that matter? They all had a good laugh at my expense. I explored my pet rabbit’s cage and surroundings as well as the forest soon after,

trying to get a sense of what occurred. No tracks, no trace evidence was left behind. The memory haunts me to this day because of the absurdity of the situation.” *research.fairfaxcounty.gov/local-history/bunnyman; singularfortean.com/news, 23 Apr 2022; 5 May 2022; 8 Apr 2023.*



NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to a tireless spinner of fortean yarns and the one-time FT associate editor behind paranormal gossip columnist The Hierophant

CHRISTOPHER FOWLER

Christopher Fowler, who died at the beginning of March from a rare cancer, was a prolific writer of horror, fantasy, science fiction and detective thrillers, often with fortean themes. His early novels and short stories such as *Rune* (1990), *Spanky* (1994), *Disturbia* (1997) and *Personal Demons* (1998), ranged from supernatural tales of curses and Faustian pacts to black comedies and nightmares of urban alienation.

From 2004 he wrote a series of 27 books featuring the London-based detectives Arthur Bryant and John May of the Peculiar Crimes Unit, a shadowy department of the Metropolitan Police who investigate unusual and esoteric crimes that lead them into curious and forgotten byways of London history. He capped the series with *Bryant & May's Peculiar London* (2022), a non-fiction book in the form of a city tour by his characters which drew together his lifetime of research into London folklore, mythology and secret histories.

Chris combined his prodigious writing output with a media career as the co-founder of The Creative Partnership, a Soho-based company that produces trailers, posters and promotional films for major Hollywood movies such as the James Bond series. One of his early contributions was the strapline for *Alien* (1979): "In space no-one can hear you scream". He relates his screen trade adventures in *Film Freak* (2014), the second volume of his memoirs; the first, *Paperboy* (2010), dealt with his childhood and the forthcoming third volume, *Word Monkey* (August 2023), with his career as an author. He wrote a long-running column on obscure 20th-century novelists for the *Independent* which was collected in two volumes, *Invisible Ink*



ABOVE LEFT: Christopher Fowler. ABOVE RIGHT: Joe McNally with friend and colleague Cathi Unsworth.

(2012) and *The Book of Forgotten Authors* (2017). He blogged regularly on his website (www.christopherfowler.co.uk) about his work, London, movies and modern life.

He was diagnosed with his terminal illness in March 2020 and given a life expectancy of six months; characteristically, he survived for three years and completed several more books.

Christopher Fowler, writer, born London, 26 Mar 1953; died London, 2 Mar 2023, aged 69. Mike Jay

JOE McNALLY

I first encountered Joe McNally in January 1998. I was waiting in the foyer of John Brown Publishing to be called up for an interview at an exciting new magazine called *Bizarre*. He came gliding out of the lift: an urban wizard in black combats and parachute boots, a mane of wild chestnut hair and voluminous beard with a golden stud glinting from its depths.

Phew, I assured myself. I've come to the right place.

So it proved and before long

we were properly acquainted. We already had a connection: Joe studied at the University of Ulster in Coleraine with Fyfe Ewing, drummer of Therapy?, a band I'd championed in my previous job at *Melody Maker*. Joe made the video for their debut single 'Meat Abstract' with a fellow alumnus known in legend as The Dark Lord. Between 1996 and 1998, he was associate editor of *Bizarre's* older sister at John Brown Publishing, *Fortean Times*; his role was recently described by our then publisher Dr Mike Dash as "to sit at the centre of everything and hold it all together". Joe's day job – which extended to channelling Tibetan gossip guru The Hierophant and pursuing a vigorous feud with Bishop Sean Manchester – was merely an extension of an incredibly agile and wickedly funny mind.

He was also *FT's* public face of the period, talking weird on such Nineties daytime TV staples as *The Time, The Place* and *This Morning*, which he routinely prepared for by

dropping acid. Richard Madeley became so mesmerised by Joe's appearance on a Hallowe'en edition of *This Morning* that he turned talk away from the origins of Samhain to ask about the significance of the stud on McNally's chin.

"It holds my beard on," came the deadpan reply.

Joe McNally was born in Belfast in 1968. His father, Comgall McNally, was a senior solicitor who became President of the Law Society of Northern Ireland and was awarded the OBE for his services to education in law; his mother, Kate, a celebrated actress. They instilled in him a deep respect and affinity for the marginalised along with a love for the theatrical that extended to his uncanny talent for mimicry. He studied at the Christian Brothers and St Malachy's College Belfast before taking his Media Studies degree, graduating in 1992 and going on to work at arts mag *DV8* and Radio Ulster. A bibliophile from an early age, Joe was always

CHRISTOPHER FOWLER: FENRIS OSWIN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. JOE McNALLY: ETIENNE GUILFAN



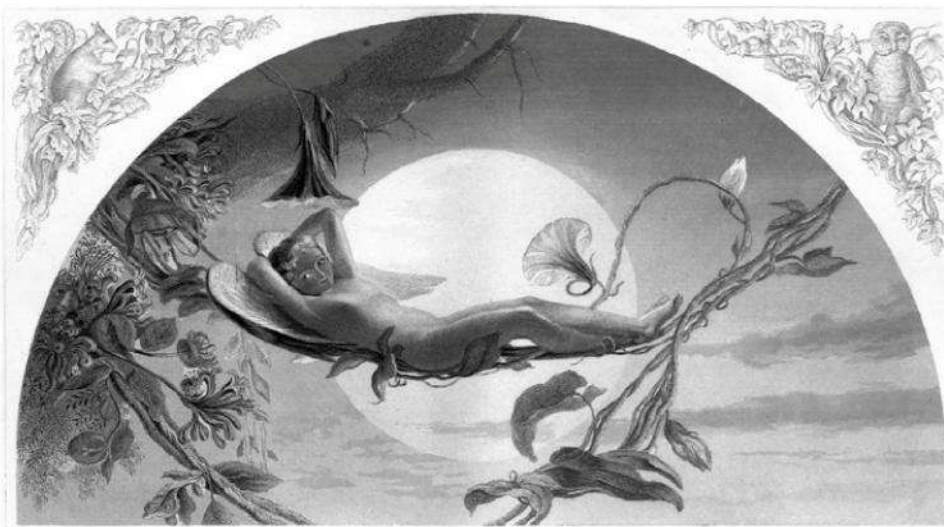
surrounded by books and comics and was generous with his recommendations; likewise with movies old and new – he loved to recall how he badgered his Dad to take him to see *Jaws* at the age of 10, only to run out of the cinema to throw up. Needless to say, he was an avid *FT* reader long before being hired in 1995 and settling in London. Moving on from *FT* – although he continued to contribute his Hierophant column for a few more years – he became *Bizarre's* Film and Internet Editor from 1998-2001, during which time he interviewed and photographed all his heroes, from Ken Russell to Miike Takashi.

From 2002 onwards he worked as sub-editor for *TV Choice* and *Total TV* magazines, while pursuing his writing and photography. The 2.3K followers on his Simon Crubellier Flickr page testify to the magic of his lens; his journalism appeared in *Another Weird Year* (Penguin, 1996 and 1999), his short story 'South' appeared in *London Noir* (Serpent's Tail, 2006); and the 1.4K followers of Gaspard Winckler (his alias on Twitter) will sorely miss his acerbic commentary on every significant breaking story. He also contributed to three Radio Ulster series between 2017-19: *New Voices*, *Science & Stuff With Emer Maguire* and *How Music Works*.

Joe was the kindest and most caring of friends, a loving brother to Catherine and Mary McNally, Uncle to Fiontan and the late Cillian Draine, and devoted to his partner Deirdre Rusling, whom he first met at university.

Joe always knew how to find the most enlightening, hilarious and original work from across the spectrum of the arts as well as leaving a significant trail himself, glinting like gold in the multifarious dimensions of the McNally Multiverse.

Joe McNally, editor, photographer, wizard of words; born Belfast 28 Aug 1968; died London 5 Mar 2023, aged 54.
Cathi Unsworth



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

IMMORTALS AMONG US

A favourite film of my adolescence, *Highlander*, began with the conceit that a number of immortals had survived through the generations interacting with each other across history: "From the dawn of time we came; moving silently down through the centuries, living many secret lives..." But what if it is true that there are immortals among us, who only occasionally come to the attention of annalists, chroniclers and journalists?

Certainly, there have been individuals who, with more or less chutzpah, have claimed to be immortal. A delightful story is told of the Count of St Germain (see *FT*146:40-44) who once recalled a conversation some 600 years before with Richard the Lionheart and, on being doubted, asked his butler to back him up. The butler demurred and the Count only then recalled that the man had been in his service "for a mere five hundred years". The Count of St Germain badly let the side down by dying in 1784.

A more impressive immortal was a certain Signor Gualdi, who turned up in Venice in the 1680s and around whom many narratives were spun. The best is that Gualdi had a portrait of himself aged 50 painted by Titian (died 1576) well over a century before! Some associated Gualdi with the Wandering Jew, that extraordinary individual who has

been – so legend tells us – walking the Earth since Christ cursed him on his way to the crucifixion.

The WJ has been encountered again and again through the centuries, even relatively recently: he was, according to one author, "twice seen in the men's room of the main branch of the New York Public Library in 1948." A 1790 document has the WJ turning up in Hull (of all places) and being briefly imprisoned there. He regularly, in fact, visited the UK and also frequented, in the 19th century, Hartlepool, Burnley and many, many times the capital. As one Victorian newspaper put it: "The Wandering Jew" is always supposed to be making his appearance in London."

One of the most unusual encounters, though, took place at wild Relugas near Forres in northern Scotland in the early or mid-19th century.

A botanist out collecting met a "dark haired, moustachio'd stranger, of grave aspect" who claimed that he was the WJ and that he had last visited the area in the 1340s. When the botanist expressed polite disbelief the stranger leapt off a steep rock face of some 200-300ft (60-90m) over a river: "He jumped down, his body tossing from rock to rock until he went splash into the river, and crossed to the other side." This is an eyewitness account.

Simon speaks with Chris Woodyard about the Byland zombie tales in the latest edition of the Boggart and Banshee Podcast.

GUALDI HAD A
PORTRAIT OF
HIMSELF AGED
50 PAINTED BY
TITIAN WELL
OVER A CENTURY
BEFORE!



Circuses – and a lot of bread

UFO festivals are fun, but **NIGEL WATSON** fears they also attract UFO grifters who exploit the gullible

THE UFO CIRCUS

UFO festivals and conferences are now back in full swing after the COVID crisis, and we can actually meet face-to-face again. In the US there is a penchant for holding annual festivals at UFO hotspots: these locations inevitably include Roswell; then there is the McMinnville UFO Fest (to celebrate the McMinnville/Trent UFO photographs taken in 1950), the Kecksburg UFO Festival (celebrating the 1965 acorn-shaped UFO crash), the Exeter UFO Festival in New Hampshire and many more. Plus, there are such things as the Ancient Aliens Live tour and UFO themed cruises.

Most of the festivals are for charity and feature alien-themed parades, food, beverage and merchandise vendors, live music, film screenings, talks and presentations. They are a fun opportunity for exchanging stories, making friends and hearing talks by famous UFO witnesses and researchers.

In the UK there is no Warminster UFO Festival, but Gary Heseltine will give you a guided tour of Rendlesham Forest if you cross his palm with a few pound coins. More conventionally, *Outer Limits Magazine* (OLM) is hosting a conference at the University of Hull on 30 September that will include talks about the abduction phenomenon by David Clarke, Philip Mantle, Peter Robbins and Ryan Sprague. The Cornwall UFO Research Group is hosting its 23rd all-day annual conference on 7 October, in Truro, and its speakers include Michael FitzGerald, Andy Thomas and Colin Woolford.

The negative side of such events is they help spread all types of UFO stories without much consideration of their validity and offer a platform for what can only be called UFO grifters who exploit gullible believers.

Jack Brewer points out that Uintah County, Utah, where the Skinwalker Ranch is located, sponsors an annual PhenomeCon to attract visitors to the area. Records obtained by Brewer and Erika Lukes, director of Expanding Frontiers Research (EFR), show a number of very large payments being made to various speakers. Brewer outlined his concerns as follows:

"Let's start with square one: The narratives surrounding Skinwalker Ranch and promoted at PhenomeCon are unverified. That's important to note when people are dubiously claiming to be conducting scientific research, as is the case. Secondly, ranch personnel, elected officials, and PhenomeCon organisers are ignoring the claims of hitchhiker effects and other potential public health hazards, other than when they find it advantageous to



promote them. Add to all of that the fact that public tax funds are used to pay speakers tens of thousands of dollars out of hundreds of thousands allocated to these events, and I think it's fair to say a conversation should be happening about municipal governments getting in the UFO carnival business." (For more, see www.expandingfrontiersresearch.org/post/uintah-county-paid-tens-of-thousands-to-phenomecon-speakers.)

Undaunted, PhenomeCon is returning on 6-9 September 2023 and includes a host of speakers dealing with such topics as Bigfoot and UFOs.

What this highlights is that most people do not take UFOs very seriously and just want to believe. They regard UFOs and aliens as a bit of fun that at most make you think about ETs, but they don't want to get bogged down by nasty facts, scepticism or alternative theories. This attitude allows the grifters to move in, and in the US you can see that they can make quite a lot of money promoting nonsense to the masses. Scepticism would kill the golden (alien) goose, so we are continually bombarded with ancient UFO stories that have been long debunked.

Olm magazine conference: olmmag.wordpress.com/conference-2023/
Cornwall conference: www.cornwall-ufo.co.uk/ufo-conference-2023.html

PhenomeCon event: www.phenomecon.net/

THE VARGINHA UFO INCIDENT

An example of a case that never seems to die is that of the famous Varginha encounter. James Fox on Twitter (16 April) informs us that "Leslie Kean reveals for the first time that her intelligence contacts confirmed the

LEFT: The flying saucer-shaped water tower in the Varginha, Brazil, commemorates the 1996 town's 1996 UFO incident.

authenticity of the Varginha UFO crash."

The incident occurred in Varginha, Minas Gerais state, Brazil on 20 January 1996. Liliame Fatima Silva, her sister Valquiria and Katia Andrade Xavier saw a creature that seemed to be in pain squatting behind an old garage. The young girls described it as being dark brown, hairless and about four feet (1.2m) tall. It had a large head, large red eyes and a small mouth and nose. Most shockingly, it had three horns sprouting from its head and it gave off a bad odour.

Soldiers from the Escola Sargentos de Armas, based in nearby Tres Coracoes, captured two creatures that were sent away in an Army truck. As many as six creatures were allegedly caught dead or alive on that fateful day, and it is rumoured they were sent to the US for further study.

The girls did not see a UFO, yet it was assumed the creatures were the victims or survivors of a UFO crash. Stories of further sightings and other rumours have escalated over time, but it is more likely an animal was misidentified and given Satan-like features by the imagination of the witnesses.

It is not surprising these 'intelligence contacts' remain anonymous – and it is all fodder for the UFO circus of festivals, conferences and endless documentaries.

<https://marcianitosverdes.haaan.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Platillos-volantes-antes-de-los-ovnis-y-la-ufolog%C3%ADa.pdf>

<https://issuu.com/diegoazuniga/docs/marchallet>

DEATH OF A UFOLOGIST

The unexpected death of British ufologist Robert Moore, who was mainly linked with the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP), shocked those who knew him. He was described as "shy, diffident, outraged, passionate – so many things. He loved archaeology, ufology, role-playing games and the music of Kate Bush. Child-like, joyful, depressed yet so funny."

His Delta Project website (www.deltapro.co.uk/Index.html) provides a more detailed insight into his UFO research and other interests. Most of all, he was never hungry for fame or fortune – he just wanted to diligently study the subject to the best of his abilities.

A tribute video to Robert can be viewed at: www.facebook.com/KristianLander/videos/57036988491718



Time in the land of OZ

JENNY RANGLES ponders time, space and our misunderstandings of the nature of the Universe

For many years I have been seeking to understand why what I call the 'Oz Factor' seems important to close encounters. It is a consistently reported set of events almost occurring as a sideline to the event itself but I suspect ultimately more significant than what kind of UFO was seen, as its consistency may help us understand the deeper nature of the Universe. I think what this odd state of consciousness tells us about how close encounters lead down the yellow brick road is important. And a fascinating new idea posed by a Scottish scientist on the nature of time and space gives intriguing context.

An illustrative case that has long seemed important to me started on a morning shopping trip across Bedfordshire on 8 August 1992. The husband, wife and two kids were expecting a short journey, as they had made it often before. It did not turn out that way at all. This case was well investigated by Judith Jafaar and Ken Phillips at BUFORA soon after, and it has always fascinated me, as it has many elements of close encounters, yet without involving a UFO. Instead, time just went awry.

The family were singing Beatles songs to pass the time on that humid morning. Suddenly, reality just went AWOL. The kids stopped singing mid-note. The parents commented on how strange it was that there was no traffic, and everything was much too quiet. It was as if they were in a timeless, dreamlike state. Then a weird all-encompassing mist appeared around them, further exacerbating the sense of oddity. Then the spell broke, and they found themselves some miles from where they should have been, on the outskirts of Woburn Sands. They felt disoriented when they got out of the car and could not coordinate their senses – even finding it hard to grasp the handles and open the car doors. The wife even wondered if they had died in a car crash and were now wandering around as ghosts; she asked her mother later if she could see them. The parents also developed redness on their hands and pins-and-needles-like pains lasting hours. The children had noted how quiet their parents had gone on the journey but seemed less affected than the adults.

This was an Oz Factor experience without a UFO – without a cause, so to speak. So here the actual cause is a key question. UFO investigators tend to go with the answer they prefer, but impartial research



The family were singing Beatles songs to pass the time when reality suddenly went AWOL

must judge this as it is. We have a state of consciousness that could have later turned into an alien contact via dreams or regression; but this was a case that never morphed any further. So we have a raw-state Oz Factor experience that leaves us scrambling to ask why it happened. Ufologists are often happy to provide an answer: aliens engineered it.

The Oz Factor is really just an unusual state of consciousness. There are many more cases like this that are deemed UFO-related, but are more amorphous than that. Indeed, I think the state of consciousness that people enter when experiencing the Oz Factor is the one thing we can with assurance believe to be real, as it is so consistently reported. But subsequently recalled events spun out of it owe at least something – perhaps a lot – to methods like hypnosis and the interpretation of associated events that may not be directly relevant but serve to enhance the oddity of the experience.

Which brings me to the ideas mooted by Lee Cronin (pictured above), the Regius Professor in Chemistry at Glasgow University, published on 28 February 2023 (<https://iai.tv/articles/time-existed-before-the-big-bang-lee-cronin-auid-2402>).

"Time is the most misunderstood aspect of reality," Cronin notes in his paper. He considers why science sees the passing of time as a kind of illusion, and how that

conflicts with the emergence of life and novelties of evolution, which would appear to require time to take place. Cronin describes an experience of what he thinks is his own recall of time in the womb before he was born and being "trapped in nothingness", then suddenly emerging "from time", where space was nothingness; thus implying that time had to preexist in some way and which fits the idea of time existing without a concept of space.

Quite a few people have similar pre-birth recalls. I am one. It has replayed in my dreams a few times and leaves a sense of claustrophobia. This is possibly why such pre-birth memories tend to be widely repressed as we grow older, as they create unpleasant sensations. Although I have heard a few others describe similar recall.

If I understand his thesis correctly, Cronin thinks this implies the existence of time as a fundamental aspect of reality, not just something produced by life experience. He thinks time travel is the key to deciding if that's so, as you can move back and forth in time only if time emerges from space. If it were a fundamental property of the Universe, which is how he sees it, then it would behave quite differently.

Cronin is most interested with how this idea impacts models of how the Universe will evolve over the next few billion years. The nature and status of time radically changes the outcome. If he is right, his ideas have a significant impact on the character not just of the Oz Factor, but of all kinds of paranormal experience. Because what we call 'paranormal' may really just be normality in this new way of looking at the Universe.

If so, then cases of the Oz Factor and other time anomalies may be major clues offered to us by the day-to-day workings of the Universe. They could tell us much about what we wrongly interpret as supernatural, since this would be just a natural, but misunderstood, aspect of the Universe.

If this proves true, it will not be the first time in the history of science that anomalies termed 'paranormal' have been the gateway to further understanding. UFO researchers might not be quite the crackpots we are often made out to be by the press (sometimes with good cause, I agree). Not if – even by accident – we are uncovering clues like this, which may lead scientific researchers who are investigating the core of reality to edge toward a better understanding of what exactly that reality is.

REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S WORLD OF STRANGE POWERS

In 1985, Arthur C Clarke was back in our living rooms with a follow-up to his *Mysterious World* series, this time focusing on such wild talents as premonitions, telepathy and stigmata. **RYAN SHIRLOW** embarks on a three-part reassessment of a fortune TV classic.

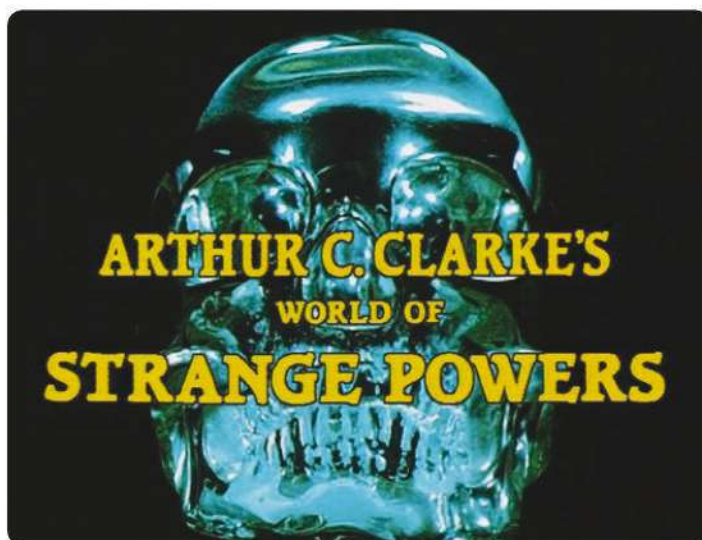
Last year, with the DVD in one hand and *The Complete Books of Charles Fort* in the other, we took a romp through sci-fi legend Arthur C Clarke's teatime television series *The Mysterious World* (FT410:32-39, 411:42-47, 412:44-49). But instead of wallowing in Eighties nostalgia, or merely reviewing the programme with the benefit of 21st century hindsight, we sought to reassess the mysteries themselves and how our thinking might have evolved over the intervening decades.

We discovered that much of Clarke's content was already a little old and flaky by the time the show was broadcast. He was able to dismiss quite a few of his own cases in each episode, and the handful of genuine mysteries that still begged a solution had, with very few exceptions, not fared well since.

From our vantage point, the iconic Mitchell-Hedges skull of the title sequence looked dull and tarnished, a 20th century fake exposed by modern analysis. The infamous 'Baghdad Battery' was lost, and the once awe-inspiring phenomena of ball lightning had fizzled out under mainstream acceptance.

But we were left with a conundrum. Despite our advances in knowledge, we remained challenged by the accounts of the ordinary people interviewed on camera. There may have been no scientific proof forthcoming for Ogopogo or the Sasquatch, but there were still plenty of people willing to testify to the reality of lake monsters and ape-men – and far stranger things besides.

For the follow-up series, originally broadcast in 1985, producer Adam Hart-Davies took the programme deeper into this

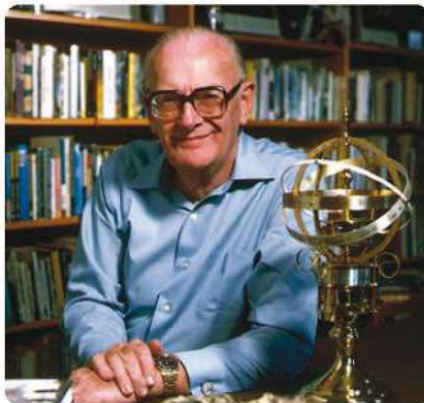


LEFT: The iconic 'Skull of Doom' returns in a revamped title sequence. BELOW: Arthur C Clarke, pondering stuff that was too weird for his previous outing into the world of fortune.

rich vein, into the realm of the more esoteric and experiential aspects of fortune, mirroring the journey that Fort himself took in his later books.

You can watch along at home with the 2015 Network DVD release. In the coming episodes we will encounter visionaries, clairvoyants, spoon benders, telepaths and stigmatics, and we must ask ourselves: will it prove so easy to dismiss the inhabitants of the *World of Strange Powers*?

THE MAN HIMSELF
WELCOMES US WITH
AN ACCOUNT OF
AN ASSOCIATE WHO
HAD SEEN AN OMEN



EPISODE 1: WARNINGS FROM THE FUTURE

We start with a revamped title sequence, the famous skull spinning within a gently blinking eye, and Alan Hawkshaw's familiar synth theme music. (Hawkshaw, an influence on many modern electronic composers in the 'hauntology' movement, sadly passed away in October last year.)

In a change of personnel, the introductory narration is now provided by newsreader Anna Ford, her understated approach adding to an impression of cool detachment and authority. Clarke, clearly seeking to promote his recent work, is now introduced as the writer of 2010.¹ The man himself welcomes us with an ominous personal account, of an associate who "had seen an omen... what he had not seen was that it forecast his own death."

The mood set, we begin our first investigation of the series: in 1979, American Airlines Flight 191 crashed with the loss of 273 passengers. Office manager David Booth had foreseen this disaster in a series of repeated dreams beginning 10

days before the accident occurred. His futile attempts to warn the Federal Aviation Administration are corroborated here by Paul Williams, who remembers taking Booth's phone call the day before, and the matching details he provided.²

Next comes a mystery intimately connected to my old neighbourhood in East Belfast, where the 'unsinkable' White Star ocean liner *Titanic* was built. After a very brief mention of the parallels between the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912 and Morgan Robertson's 1898 disaster novel *Futility, or The Wreck of the Titan* (see FT415:40-44) we are treated to the real-life testimony of iceberg survivor Eva Hart.³ Talking to camera, Eva provides an emotive living link to what now seems the very distant past. She was only seven years old when her mother's sixth sense helped them make it to the lifeboat ahead of the other passengers. But there were more than 1,300 people onboard for the *Titanic*'s maiden voyage. As with any suitably large scale event or long distance journey, it would perhaps be stranger if nobody had panicked or acted out their anxieties. It's just that in this case, Mrs Hart happened to be right.

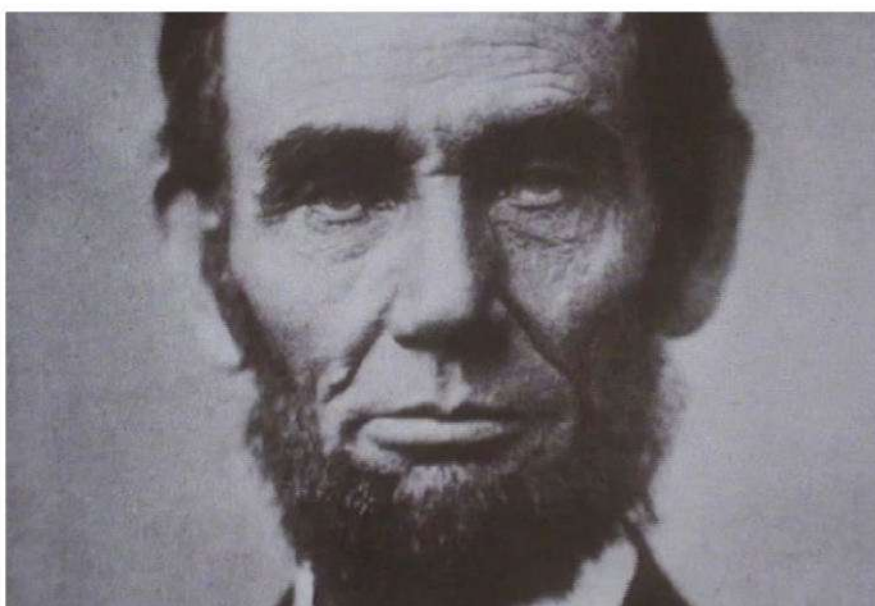
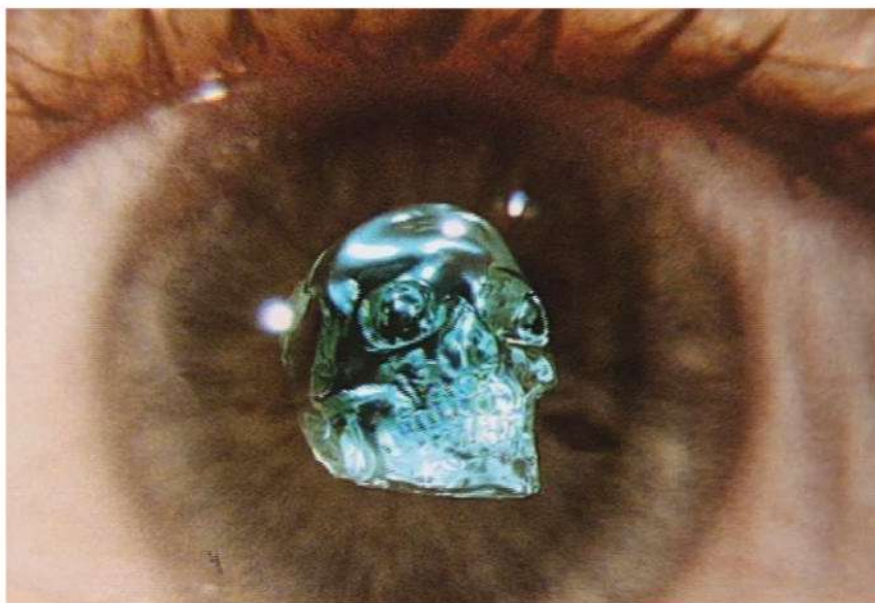
A change of tone: we make it safely across the Atlantic, continue heading West, and arrive at Caesar's Palace in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Californian Lawyer Jeff Randal scooped the jackpot on the one armed bandits, having claimed to friends that his winnings were guaranteed weeks in advance. One might wryly contrast how many gamblers boast of forthcoming losses.

We are reminded, inaccurately, that Abraham Lincoln saw his own coffin in the White House, days before he was assassinated (by another Booth). This much repeated historical factoid is undermined by its only source, published 20 years later.⁴ A sceptical Clarke points out how often premonition anecdotes are told well after the event.

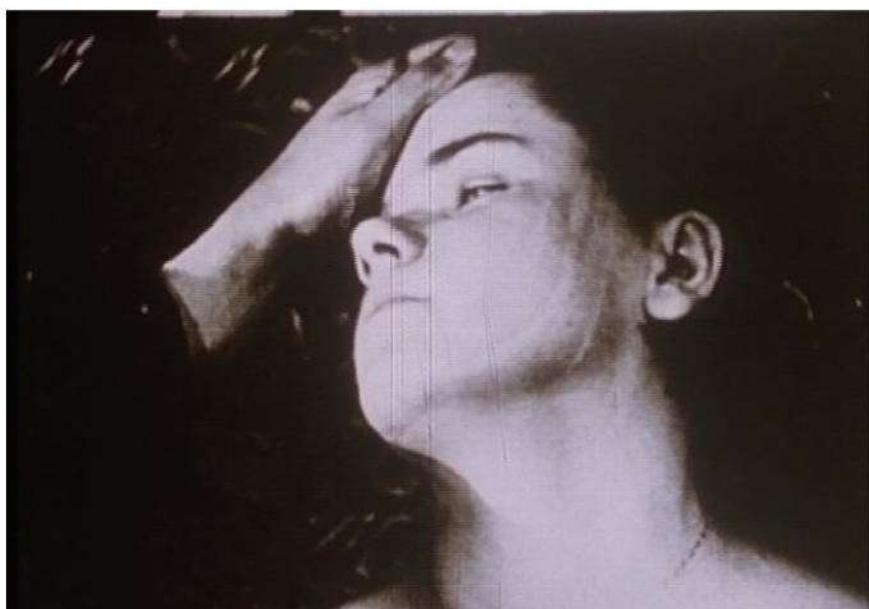
Next, the tragedy of Aberfan (FT350:44-51, 415:32-38), the little Welsh girl and the parents who failed to heed her vivid nightmares: hours later, she and her school friends would lie buried beneath tons of subsiding colliery spoil in one of the most horrific industrial accidents in the UK's history.

The disaster and the mystery that sprang up in its aftermath inspired Peter Fairly to establish the *Evening Standard* Premonitions Bureau. We are treated to their greatest hits, singling out Lorna Middleton who consistently "scored above average" (doesn't somebody have to?). But when Fairly investigated his star correspondents their gifts proved elusive. His conclusion was that premonitions were a form of intuition: if you applied conscious thought to it, it slipped away.⁵

Other examples in this episode include Lesley Brennan, who witnessed the Flixborough nitro-chemical plant explosion in a news bulletin five hours before it happened⁶ and the sinking of the submarine *Artemis*, predicted by local girl Sandra MacDonald. She was a 'friend' of



TOP: More from the new title sequence. CENTRE: Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States. Contrary to popular history he did not foresee his own assassination. ABOVE: Lesley Brennan watched the Flixborough chemical plant explode in a news bulletin broadcast five hours before it happened.



NEXT COMES A DANCING WALKING STICK THAT TAPS OUT 'JINGLE BELLS' IN A BARNSELEY PUB

some of the sailors, we are informed by a straight-faced Ford.

As well as highlighting the power of coincidence, and subconscious foresight, Clarke takes on the straight-up fraudulent, exposing Tamara Rand's faked prediction of the shooting of President Ronald Reagan (recorded the day after but dated to three months previously). The footage features some dramatic American English flying well under the censor's radar.

Meanwhile, Richard Newton lays out how he used nothing more esoteric than statistics to predict an air disaster in the Persian Gulf.

Regular readers will already have noted how claims of predictions continue to cluster around major events and disasters, such as the 911 terror attacks (FT152:06, 154:13, 156:16, 282:08).⁷ Recent pundits have claimed that Nostradamus and the psychic Sylvia Browne predicted the coronavirus pandemic.⁸ Sadly, many scientists and public health officials can reasonably lay claim to having foreseen this particular tragedy, but their carefully evidenced warnings proved just as futile as the dreams of David Booth.⁹

EPISODE 2: THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

Clarke opens with a floating loaf of bread in Kiribathgoda, not far from his Sri Lankan retreat, which he uses to introduce the wider phenomenon of poltergeists. I have written before about noisy spirits (FT393:56-57), describing how dodgy electrics, archaic plumbing and anti-social neighbours were at the root of a dramatic series of events my wife and I experienced in a 19th century property in Pudsey, West Yorkshire. However, I accept that many cases go far beyond my ability to explain.

In Thornton Road, Ward End, Birmingham, five houses were kept under constant siege by a bizarre bombardment of carefully washed rocks lasting several years. The programme focuses on the material cost to the inhabitants of having repeatedly to replace the smashed windows. Chief Inspector Len Turley is left stumped and no vandals are identified despite the deployment of substantial police resources.¹⁰

A similar case is identified in Tucson, Arizona, but a little online research shows contemporary reports pointed the finger at a local vagrant.¹¹ Mere seconds are expended on poltergeists in Swansea, Bournemouth and France. We are shown some intriguing, but far too brief, footage of Romanian teenager Eleonora Zugun (FT347:17), highlighting the horrific scratches that

TOP: Chief Inspector Len Turley shows us one of the mysterious polished stones, thrown by unseen hands on the streets of Birmingham. **CENTRE:** Elenora Zugun manifests horrific marks upon her body, **ABOVE:** Michael Collindridge is treated to a dancing walking stick in a pub in Barnsley.

spontaneously appeared on her body in the 1920s. (Her desperately sorry tale and her complicated relationship with the Viennese Countess that promoted, controlled, or hoaxed her case is expanded upon in the Romanian language Wikipedia¹² and creepy news website The Line-up.¹³)

Then, on to a Manchester factory poltergeist (one that conveniently refuses to damage the produce) and a dancing walking stick that taps out ‘Jingle Bells’ in a Barnsley pub. A brief note on the *Barnsley Chronicle* website suggests ghost hunters returned to check it out in 2016.¹⁴ If you’re a former member of the South Yorkshire Amateur Paranormal Society and you lived to tell the tale, please get in touch.

Throughout, Hawkshaw rises to the challenge of soundtracking the spooky and the absurd. Clarke advises open-minded scepticism and provides some clear examples of fraud: a crockery smashing shop assistant in Bremen offers welcome light relief.

In Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, mysterious tremors are traced to air bubbles trapped in the sewer main. British parapsychologist Tony Cornell conducts a test of the wider ‘geophysical’ hypothesis, but Anna Ford explains that his “powerful vibrator” (ahem) fails to reproduce the desired effects in a derelict house.

Perhaps surprisingly, Clarke feels compelled to take polts seriously, “almost against my will”, and refers to the consistent connection with disturbed adolescents seen across many centuries and cultures.¹⁵

We conclude in a German office plagued by the phone-omenon of rapid-fire calls to the speaking clock. Professor Hans Bender names office junior Anne Marie as the unwitting psychic focal point. Unknown to Clarke and Hart-Davies, Bender’s investigation had already been heavily criticised in the German language media a full 15 years previously.¹⁶ This highlights the difficulty inherent in reporting on forteana from abroad, especially in the days before automated online translation services.

Conspicuous by its absence is the iconic 1977 Enfield Poltergeist case (FT32:47-48, 33:4-5, 166:39, 229:58, 288:18, 329:51, 368:24-25) explored in detail by Guy Lyon Playfair.¹⁷ Perhaps they were planning to keep it back for its own show...

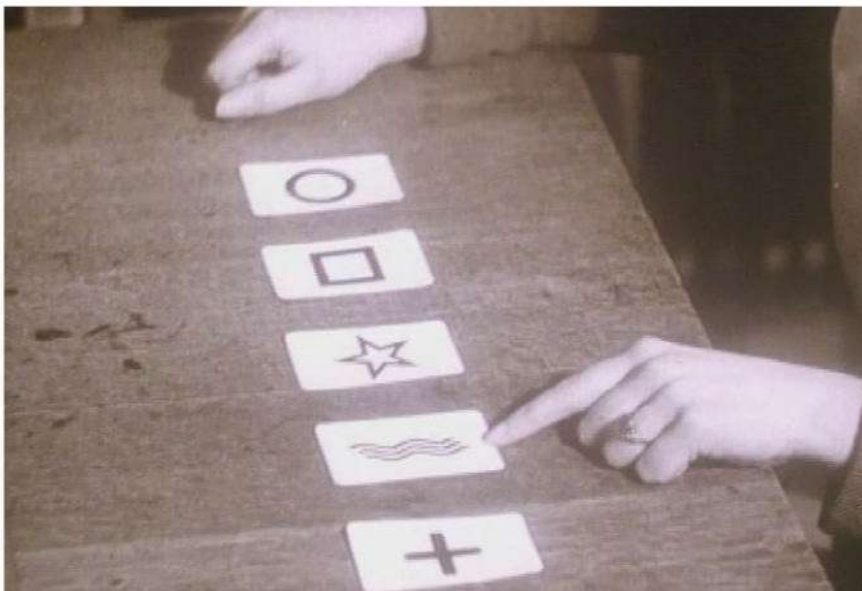
EPISODE 3: FROM MIND TO MIND

Clarke uses this episode to introduce JB Rhine’s seminal 1934 work *Extra-Sensory Perception*, which he reveals was the inspiration behind his breakthrough 1953 novel *Childhood’s End*. The rest of this episode unfurls at a comparatively gentle pace, allowing us a rare chance to reflect upon each item. Which is a pity really, as none turns out to be terribly impressive.

Mrs Joicey Hurth, of Cedarburg, Wisconsin, rings the cinema in a panic to ask if her daughter has been hurt. The little girl had been hit by a car a few seconds before. Mrs Hurth reported similar psychic incidents throughout her life,¹⁸ but these



TOP: Tony Cornell’s ‘powerful vibrator’ fails to impress narrator Anna Ford. **CENTRE:** Lights swinging in a haunted office. Subsequent investigation suggested hidden wires were used to produce the effects. **ABOVE:** Ernesto Spinelli makes psychic experiments fun for British schoolchildren. Would today’s headteachers be so open-minded?



TOP: Zener cards being used to test for alleged psi effects under 'laboratory conditions'. **CENTRE:** The 'receiver' is immersed in the Ganzfeld to enable complete focus on the transmitted image. **ABOVE:** Preacher Lucy Rael and her daughter both displayed the wounds of Christ on their bodies.

events must be seen in the wider context of all the worried parents whose children do not come to harm.

Norfolk midwife Gladys Wright is unable to sleep; she dresses and goes to a patient's house, arriving in the nick of time to safely deliver the woman's baby.

Shirley Evans is awoken in the dead of night by an apparition of her friend Pat dressed in a peculiar ragged gown, which she draws for the camera. At the time, Pat was in agony in hospital... with an injured ankle. The story dribbles to an anticlimax and much is made of the mysterious hospital gown, despite the photo barely resembling Shirley's drawing.

Clarke moves us on from spontaneous to deliberate attempts at communication. Journalist Harold Sherman claimed to be in receipt of psychic messages from arctic explorer Sir Hubert Wilkins, who had been hired by the Russian government to search for a missing aircraft. Wilkins somehow projected to Sherman that he wished to cancel an order for a replacement radio component (well... why would he need it?). Comparing Sherman's diary with the expedition log reveals other odd matches, but these powers had clearly reached their limit, for the lost Russian plane was never found. Wilkins later became a devotee of something called the *Urantia Book*, which is worthy of a whole article in its own right.¹⁹

Next, Mary Sinclair and her reproductions of drawings hidden inside sealed envelopes. We are told her informal experiments were "unsupervised". In contrast, JB Rhine conducted his thousands of experiments at Duke University, using specially designed packs of 'Zener cards' (as featured in Peter Venkman's pick-up routine in the original *Ghostbusters*). For various objections to Rhine's work, see the multiple comments collated here.²⁰ We are told British researchers (eagle eyes will spot 'Society for Physical Research' on the door) similarly "failed to convince the world."

The infectiously enthusiastic Ernesto Spinelli describes his analysis of over 2,000 school children in the UK, using his own child-friendly version of the card experiment. The older the child, the lower their apparent ESP. Echoing Fort, Spinelli theorises that telepathy is a gift we are all born with, but that as we get older we build up mental defences to actively prevent it from being used.²¹ Or perhaps the younger children were simply prone to selecting their favourite pictures over and over again? Spinelli's online biographies now make no reference to his amazing early discoveries, but, hearteningly, he still sports the same impressive shock of tightly curled footballer's hair.

Finally: white noise, red lights and gaffer-taped ping-pong balls – it's 'Ganzfeld' time.²² Julie Milton records the psychic impressions successfully received in her sensory deprivation chamber. Well into the



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ERNESTO SPINELLI THEORISES THAT TELEPATHY IS A GIFT WE ARE ALL BORN WITH

21st century, Milton was still writing in this field, an online abstract bemoans the difficulty she encounters in replicating her early results.²³

EPISODE 4: STIGMATA – THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST?

It's fair to say I remember this episode better than any other. For me, the phenomenon of stigmata constitutes the fortean motherlode – rooted in deeply conservative religious faith, yet shocking and transgressive in its manifestation. We can approach it as a gift of the Holy Spirit, a symptom of serious mental illness, as an obvious and hucksterish fraud – and on the haunted TV of the 1980s, it was perfect teatime entertainment.

Clarke explains the basics: stigmatics suffer the wounds of Christ, shedding blood from their hands and feet from the marks left by the Crown of Thorns and where the centurion's spear pierced Jesus' side. As we see throughout the episode, Clarke believes in the reality of this affliction, but very much that it is of a psychosomatic rather than transcendent spiritual nature. (For more on stigmata, see FT163:36-40, 306:46-49)



TOP: One of the series' more disturbing images: the bloodied robes of Therese Neumann.
ABOVE: St Francis of Assisi, the first alleged stigmatic, receiving the wounds of Christ.



TOP: Twentieth century stigmatic Padre Pio. **CENTRE:** And a lunchbox full of his sacred scabs. **ABOVE:** Cloretta 'Cocoa' Robinson, the first non-white, non-Catholic stigmatic. **FACING PAGE:** Arthur C Clarke, peering into his very small crystal ball to see what's coming up in the next batch of episodes.

In New Mexico, preacher Lucy Rael takes a break from her national tour. We hear her promote the stigmata on local radio as if there were a sale at the supermarket. The small town parishioners work themselves into a frenzy with repetitive music and dance in a scene straight out of Nick Cave's *Fifteen Feet of Pure White Snow*, as oily red liquid duly flows from Lucy's outstretched palms. Opinion remains divided amongst Christians about the authenticity of her performance. ²⁴

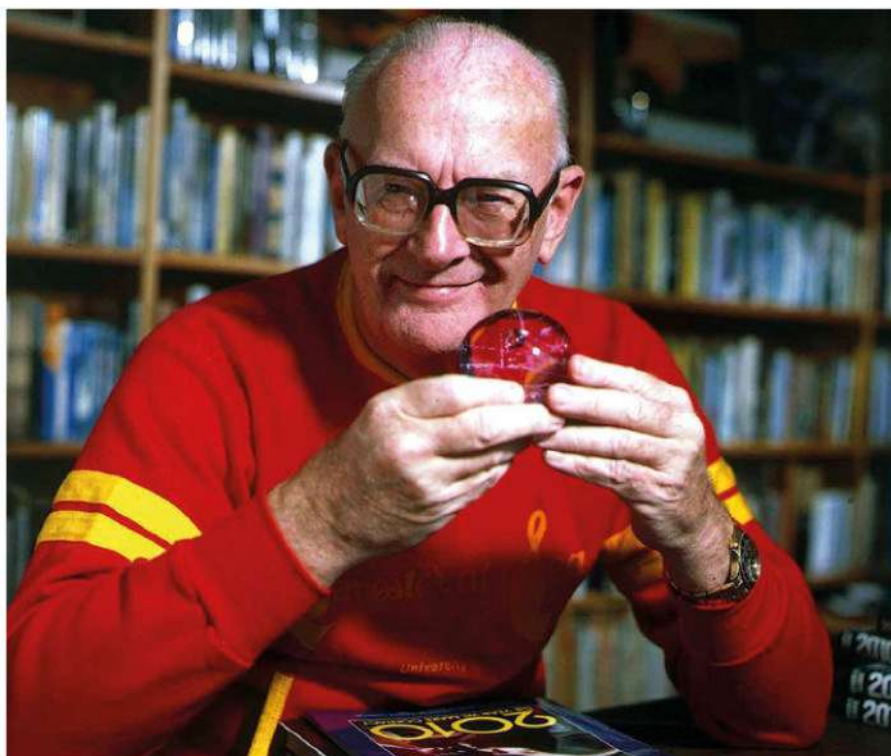
Anna Ford takes us through a history of the phenomenon, starting with St Francis of Assisi, the first stigmatic, only 1,200 odd years after the crucifixion. We proceed through St Catherine of Sienna, Anne Catherine Emerich, Gemma Galgani (now known as St Gemma) and Theresa Neumann, mentioned by Fort in *Lo!*, who links stigmatics with the flow of blood from statues and holy pictures. ²⁵ All have their fans and detractors. Otto Muck failed to impress experts in the 1930s, who believed his wounds were self-inflicted. Giulia Georgini's injuries brought her fame and riches, until her corruption was exposed and she was thrown into an Italian jail. At the time of broadcast, a Portuguese stigmatic was under medical investigation and 'self-styled pope' Clemente Gomez was active in southern Spain.

The most famous stigmatic of modern times, we learn, was Padre Pio (**FT124:18, 162:34-39**). His wounds first appeared in 1918 and bled for half a century, often drawing huge crowds. Pio is credited with miracles of healing and the gift of prophecy (they don't mention flying and bilocating; too rich for a modern audience). We see Pio's austere cell, persevered for posterity, complete with his modified shoes and Tupperware full of his venerated scabs.

A Devil's advocate, the term used here in its original meaning, reviews the evidence at the Vatican tribunal that will decide whether Pio should be beatified. Despite allegations of self-mutilation, Saint Pio was eventually canonised by Pope John Paul II in 2002. ²⁶

Clarke pours cold water on the wounds, pointing out that the Romans crucified their victims by driving nails through their wrists, not palms (otherwise you'd fall off the cross). Stigmatics also vary on which side they have been struck by the Spear of Destiny, for the Bible is mute on this detail. Instead the wounds invariably match the religious icons they have been exposed to.

We conclude in Oakland, California, at the New Light Baptist Church, with Cloretta 'Cocoa' Robinson, the first non-white, non-Catholic stigmatic. Investigations at the local paediatric clinic confirm no obvious point of origin for the blood flowing from her hands. Great significance is attached to her recent reading material – John Webster's *Crossroads* ²⁷ – and the intensity of her identification with Christ leading her to "bleed in sympathy".



A now adult Cloretta describes the obvious difficulties of living with the stigmata, with the blood of Christ leaking out at inconvenient moments and spoiling dinner dates with boys. Psychiatrist Dr David Agle determines that with a little help she should be able to control both her extreme sensations of guilt and the mysterious flows. Medicine now recognises that in stress-related conditions such as hematohydrosis, the patient's blood can enter the sweat glands and produce stigmata-like effects.²⁸

Clarke wraps things up with his conclusion that the stigmata demonstrate the miraculous mental power of religious faith.²⁹ To showcase another, more musical manifestation of faith, we are played out by a raucous gospel-funk band.

INTERIM THOUGHTS

Even if we diligently set aside all the frauds and the coincidences, we are still left with a groundswell of weird testimony, irrational belief and improbable personal experience. I think that as fortune-seers we recognise there is something essential to the human condition that we should be able to glean from these reports, something that science can't reassure us about: hard facts can only tell us what we *should* see, not what our fragile minds will actually discern, especially when we are panicked, confused, or taken under the influence of others.

Let's see where the following episodes take us, in next month's journey through the *World of Strange Powers*...

If you want to join in, I'd recommend buying the excellent 2015 Network DVD collection, which offers by far the best way to view all 13 episodes of this classic series. Available at: <https://networkonair.com>

NOTES

1 The sequel to the more famous *2001: A Space Odyssey* was released in 1982, three years before broadcast.

2 Wikipedia edits Booth out of its summary, ascribing his 'vague' premonitions to mere coincidence in the discussion. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:American_Airlines_Flight_191

3 There is a short summary of the similarities here: www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/futility-or-wreck-of-titan-morgan-robertson-1912

4 www.history.com/news/did-abraham-lincoln-predict-his-own-death

5 See [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/04/the-psychiatrist-who-believed-](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/04/the-psychiatrist-who-believed-people-could-tell-the-future)

[people-could-tell-the-future](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/04/the-psychiatrist-who-believed-people-could-tell-the-future) for more on Aberfan and Peter Fairly's work with the Bureau.

6 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Flixborough_disaster. Lesley's contribution has been similarly expunged from Wikipedia.

7 See for example: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1310994/The-9-11-victims-foresaw-deaths-New-book-claims-victims-premonitions-atrocity.html

8 www.express.co.uk/news/weird/1256553/Coronavirus-Sylvia-Browne-prediction-COVID19-prophecy-pneumonia

9 www.nytimes.com/2021/05/06/books/review/the-premonition-michael-lewis.html

10 For speculation on a 'giant catapult' see www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/the-birmingham-poltergeist-case-30-years-178411.

11 www.upi.com/Archives/1983/12/07/Hunting-the-phantom-rock-thrower/5096439621200/

12 https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleonora_Zugun

13 <https://the-line-up.com/eleonore-zugun>. See also Fort, *Complete Books*, p.965.

14 www.barnsleychronicle.com/article/10495/ghost-hunters-to-investigate-former-pub

15 In *Wild Talents*, Fort proposes an occult power associated with these children, rather than the actions of an external spirit. *Complete Books*, p.925.

16 The office furniture was moved by sophisticated puppetry, see 'Ghosts or Nylon?' <https://www.zeit.de/1970/15/geister-oder-nylon/komplettansicht>

17 Playfair's book *This House is Haunted* was first published in 1980 and is both an excellent read and a useful handrail for investigating cases yourself.

18 As recounted in David Ray Griffin's, *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality: A Postmodern Exploration*.

19 https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Urantia_Notebook_of_Sir_Hubert_Wilki.html?id=11cmjgEACAAJ&redir_esc=y

20 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zener_cards

21 See *Lo!*, Fort, *Complete Books*, p.572-573: "Wherein children are atavistic, they may be in rapport with forces that mostly humans have outgrown."

22 From the German 'entire field'.

23 www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315247366-17/ganzfeld-research-continue-crucial-search-replicable-psi-effect-part-discussion-paper-introduction-to-electronic-mail-discussion-julie-milton?context=ubx

24 www.scribd.com/document/46285926/Lucy-Rael-the-Witch-that-Fools-Christians

25 Fort, *Complete Books*, pp.584-585.

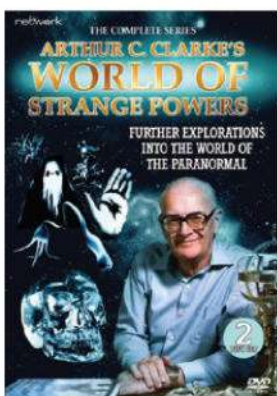
26 www.livescience.com/42822-stigmata.html.

27 There was a British theologian of that name, but the book itself is not proving easy to trace.

28 www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3827523/.

29 The phenomenon, in its broadest sense, is not limited to Christianity. See for example: www.islamcan.com/miracles/quranic-verses-appear-on-miracle-baby-in-dagestan-russia.shtml

➡ **RYAN SHIRLOW** is a Northern Irish fortune teller, writer and musician. His album *Ullstair University - Vol.1* is available on Woodford Halse via bandcamp.com



THE LEGEND OF BLOODY MARY

Say her name three times in front of the bathroom mirror and her ghostly figure will appear! **REBECCA BATLEY** traces the tangled, but possibly historical, roots of an enduring legend that continues to terrify girl guides and inspire horror movies even today.

Almost every child in Britain or America has encountered the legend of Bloody Mary. The idea is that if you stand in the bathroom, stare into the mirror and chant “Bloody Mary” three times before turning around, the ghostly figure of Mary will appear behind you. Sometimes she will be dripping with blood; sometimes she is holding a dead baby. Sometimes she is relatively benign, but on other occasions she foretells death for her unfortunate summoner. The usual practice is for this to be a school bathroom dare – one that usually descends into screaming long before the chanting can be completed.

The legend has proved to be both powerful and enduring, spawning numerous horror films and television programmes.¹ But what is the truth and who is the woman behind the legend of Bloody Mary?

MARY TUDOR

It is Queen Mary I who has the dubious honour of being assigned in perpetual infamy the name of ‘Bloody Mary’, and it is most probable that she is the source of the legend.

Mary was the only surviving child of Henry VIII of England and his first wife Katherine of Aragon. Born on 18 February 1516, Mary was a disappointment from the start: her parents had desperately hoped for a male heir to consolidate the Tudor dynasty. Until her teens she was England’s beloved princess; that is, until her father fell in love with Anne Boleyn and was willing to remake the entire religious landscape of England in order to marry her. He broke with the Roman Catholic Church, the faith in which Mary had been raised, and declared himself Head of the Church of England and therefore able to divorce Katherine. Mary was declared illegitimate on the basis that her parents’ marriage had been unlawful in the eyes of God and instead of Princess she became Lady Mary. No longer the inheritor of England, she was sent into semi-exile in the countryside and separated from her mother, who did not, and never would, accept the ‘divorce’, styling herself Queen until the day she died. Mary refused to acknowledge Henry as Head of the Church of England, or the validity of her parents’ divorce, until 1536, when after her mother’s death and faced with the threat of



imprisonment or worse for both herself and her supporters she capitulated. Her father’s threats were not idle ones: just a few weeks after Katherine’s death he executed Anne Boleyn.

Mary returned to the royal fold and watched as her half-sister Elizabeth, Henry’s daughter by Anne Boleyn, was stripped of her

titles as Mary had once been and as her next stepmother, Jane Seymour, finally bore her father the son he longed for, though she died in the process. Mary lived through three more stepmothers and became increasingly pious.

In 1547, on the death of their father, her half-brother acceded to the throne as King Edward VI. He was staunchly Protestant



ABOVE: The burning of Thomas Cranmer from Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. BELOW: The frontispiece of Foxe's book, which helped cement Mary's bloody reputation.

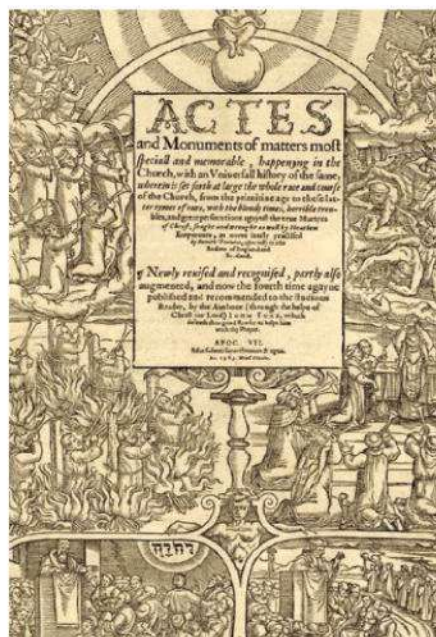
– an anathema to Mary's Catholic faith. Continually threatened by her brother, who sought to prevent her and her household from hearing Mass, Mary considered fleeing abroad to her cousin the Holy Roman Emperor.

This proved to be unnecessary, as Edward died on 6 July 1553 aged just 15. His last act was to try to secure the Protestant succession by leaving the throne to his cousin Lady Jane Grey. This aimed to circumvent Henry VIII's will, by which Mary should succeed if Edward died childless, followed by Elizabeth in the unlikely event Mary did too. Given this, popular support was with Mary, as the people wanted to see a true Tudor on the throne. Lady Jane Grey was deposed, and in August 1553 Mary rode into London at the head of an army of loyal supporters, which included Elizabeth and over 800 nobles.

BURNING DESIRES

Now that she was queen, Mary set about restoring Catholicism with a will. One of her first acts was to order the release of the Catholic Thomas Howard and Archbishop Stephen Gardiner from the Tower. This was just the start of her campaign to bring England back into the fold of the Roman Catholic Church. She married arguably the greatest Catholic monarch in Europe, Philip II of Spain, at Winchester Cathedral on 25 July 1554 and overturned all of her half-brother's anti-Catholic policies.

BETWEEN 1555 AND 1558 AROUND 300 MEN AND WOMEN WERE BURNT AT MARY'S COMMAND



In 1555 Mary went even further and invoked the law for which she would be eternally damned by history. The *heretico comburendo* allowed for Protestant heretics refusing to accept Mary's reforms to be burnt to death at the stake. It seems likely that Mary thought that a short series of burnings would scare Protestants into accepting the Catholic restoration. If this was her plan, then it backfired spectacularly and the people turned on their queen as the burnings intensified.

Between 1555 and 1558 around 300 Protestant men and women were burnt at Mary's express command. These burnings were recorded by John Foxe in a book that he titled *Acts and Monuments of these Latter and Perilous days Touching matters of the Church* – later simply abbreviated to the *Book of Martyrs*. The text was replete with 60 gruesome and vivid illustrations and descriptions, such as that showing the burning of Thomas Tompkins, a weaver from Shoreditch who was examined by Bishop Bonner and even under torture refused to say that he accepted the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

Another of Mary's victims was Bishop Thomas Cranmer, whom Mary blamed for making possible her parents' divorce and everything that followed. Cranmer was by now an old man and, fearful of the fire, he recanted his life's work and once again accepted the authority of the Pope. This was

a huge propaganda triumph for Mary, but under law Cranmer should therefore have been spared execution. However, Mary was in no mood to forgive and personally intervened to make sure that he would burn. Cranmer took back his recantations and famously declared that the hand that had signed them should be punished by burning, before declaring that he refused “the Pope as Christ’s enemy and Antichrist with all his false doctrine.”

Mary’s government produced a welter of pamphlets that printed the words of his previous recantations, but news of his courageous death was already spreading and rendered the propaganda ineffective, especially when Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* went into print and immortalised the details of Cranmer’s execution.

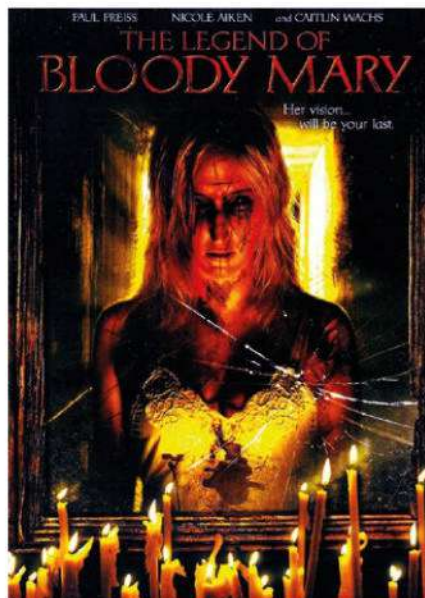
It is not known when the epithet ‘Bloody Mary’ was originally used, but it was in place by the latter part of the 16th century, by which time she had become a figure of fear, used as a threat to adults and children alike. By the mid-16th century the writer Bartholomew Traheron was writing that her tyranny meant that she “swimmeth in the holy blood of the most innocent, virtuous and excellent personages.” Such enduring images only increased in influence following the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in November 1605, when hatred of Catholicism reached new heights.

DEAD BABIES

There is another aspect of Mary’s life that ties in with the legend and the appearance of the dead baby. In some versions, one rather cruel way to counteract the curse of her presence is to taunt her with the words “*I killed (or stole) your baby*”.

When she took the throne, Mary quickly began to look for a husband and after her marriage to Philip, having children was her priority. This, to Mary’s mind at least, was a true love marriage ordained for the procreation of children and if Catholic England was to survive she needed a Catholic heir. She was known to be a lover of children – she stood as godmother to many children of the nobility and lavished care and gifts upon them – but by the time she married she was already 38, old for childbearing by contemporary standards. Nevertheless, within two months of her wedding in September 1554 Mary announced that she was pregnant, and that by October the baby had ‘quickened’ in her womb. For Catholic Europe this was a triumph, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V wrote to his secretary Francisco de Eraso that “she (Mary) is now considered certainly to be with child and that the people in general are pleased.” He wrote to his son Philip a few days later declaring that he was “overjoyed to hear of the condition of the queen, my good daughter and that there is hope that God will give us successors by her... my desire is that she should be careful of her health and take things easily.” By November, Mary’s belly had swollen and, according to

THE LEGEND OF BLOODY MARY IS UNUSUAL IN THAT IT APPEARS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC



the Spanish ambassador, “her dresses no longer fit her”. Mary was delighted, and was described by contemporaries as “colourful” and “very happy”.

Royal childbirth was governed by strict procedure and Mary followed it to the letter, taking to her chamber six weeks before her baby was due in May. She now entered an exclusively female world, as it was considered improper for men to attend a lady during the last stages of her pregnancy. She spent her days resting, sewing and praying as she awaited the birth, while outside the chamber all the final preparations were in place by mid-April.

Her doctors, however, appear to have become concerned, and several were nervous about the potential consequences of their involvement in the upcoming birth. Mary had little appetite and they worried about the effects on the baby. All these fears, it seemed, were unfounded: on 30 April, the bells began to toll, fires were lit and celebrations occurred throughout the capital celebrating the birth of a prince. Whatever the people’s feelings about Mary’s religion, she had now done her duty and secured the succession.

Sadly for Mary, this was not the case, and the truth eventually got out. By June, there was no news and by July Mary seems to have been convinced that her child could not be born until all Protestants were punished, sparking another wave of burnings. By now, though, no one but the Queen truly believed there was a child, and in July Charles V was informed that “it is doubted whether she really is with child although

LEFT: One of a number of horror films based on the story was 2008’s *The Legend of Bloody Mary*.

outward signs are good and she asserts that she is indeed pregnant.” London was awash with rumours, that the foetus was a monkey or dog or even that a woman had been approached to give up her baby to be passed off as the Queen’s. After 11 months of supposed pregnancy Mary finally emerged from her chamber, broken and humiliated. It is believed that she was suffering from pseudocyesis, a phantom pregnancy, a condition still not fully understood even today. Few were sympathetic towards Mary, and her Protestant opponents quickly used it as proof that she was being punished by God for her Catholic heresy.

It was also viewed as a sign of feminine weakness: her marriage had never been popular with the English nobility, who feared that ‘King’ Philip would seek to take over, displace them and “rule the country with Spaniards.” It was even less popular among the people who expressed a growing fear of Catholicism. Mary, it was argued, had put her personal feelings ahead of what was best for England, and now she was being punished.

She did not survive long. She had a further phantom pregnancy, which no one seems to have taken terribly seriously, and died in 1558, haunted by visions of angels and singing children.

MARY GOES WEST

Her legend, however, only grew in notoriety. Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* became so popular that it was even placed inside churches, and within just a few years of her death Mary’s reputation as Bloody Mary, the Catholic tyrant, had been cemented in English folklore.

The legend manifested itself throughout English culture, even in nursery rhymes. The rhyme ‘Mary, Mary quite contrary’ is said to reference Mary’s lack of an heir, cockle shells being symbols of barrenness, and the ‘pretty maids all in a row’ referencing innocent Protestant martyrs, like Lady Jane Grey, lined up for execution. The legend of Mary in the mirror is first historically attested to in the 19th century, but it is clear it echoes the horror stories popular in Elizabethan and Stuart England.

The legend of Bloody Mary is unusual in that it appears on both sides of the Atlantic. In America it was adopted by and associated with another Mary. This was a far shadier figure called Mary Worth, who, according to the legend, was believed to be a witch because she lived deep in the forest and sold herbal remedies. There is no historical proof that Mary Worth ever existed, but her name certainly endures and seems to have evolved in the period following the Salem Witch trials. The story goes that Mary was feared by the local villagers, who suspected her when young girls began to go missing. Those who were brave enough to venture



JAGGED EDGE PRODUCTIONS

ABOVE AND BELOW: Beatrice Fletcher looks into the mirror in the 2021 low-budget British film *Bloody Mary*; clearly, the legend continues to provide satisfying scares.

into the forest found that Mary appeared ever more youthful despite the passing years. One night, the miller's daughter woke in pain, and her mother treated her with a tincture bought from Mary Worth. Enticed by a noise that only she could hear, the miller's daughter went into the forest, where Mary Worth was seen to be surrounded by a supernatural glow. The villagers first shot then burnt Mary at the stake. It is said as she burned, Mary set a curse upon her killers: that if they should ever dare to say her name to a mirror she could come back from the dead and exact her revenge. Her soul would be set free, but theirs would burn for all eternity.

Another version of the legend states that Mary Worth was in fact a member of the "reverse underground railroad" whereby, in the words of Bob Jensen, a paranormal investigator from Lake County Ghostland Society, she would "bring in slaves under false pretences to send them back down south and make some money." In this version, Mary is again eventually caught and burnt.

There are definite echoes here of the Mary I burnings and folklore expert Dr Daniel Compore suggests that Bloody Mary should be regarded as a migratory legend – one that shares "a strong context, in this case gender/female power" and which "moves from one community to another through word of mouth." He believes that we should regard Mary I as the source for the legend and that the horrors of her reign, as well as the dangers of feminine power that she represented, were adapted in the New World to serve a similar purpose: to generate fear and exert control.

MIRROR, MIRROR

We should also consider what part the mirror plays in the legend. The idea that mirrors could hold souls or were portals to the afterlife is an ancient one. In ancient Egypt mirrors were often used in purification rituals as they were said to reflect the ka/ spirit of a person. By the time of Tudor England John Dee, astronomer to Mary's sister Elizabeth I, mirrors were believed to be astronomical tools through which predictions about the future could be made and the dead could be summoned. Modern Voodoo still believes that they can be used

to feed ghosts. So the idea that a soul, in this case Bloody Mary's spirit, could be summoned using a mirror was one with historical precedents.

But why have so many people reported seeing Bloody Mary? The question of what causes visions in mirrors has recently been extensively studied by psychologists such as Giovanni Caputo of the University of Urbino, who has argued that staring into a mirror for a period of time can lead to hallucinations where "facial features appear

to melt, distort, disappear and rotate whilst other hallucinatory elements such as strange faces may appear". He calls this phenomenon the 'strange face' illusion, in which the brain's facial recognition process fails for reasons that are not fully understood. In this context, it is suggested that the process could trigger visions of Bloody Mary in individuals exposed to the legend at some point.

Science writer Esther Inglis-Arkerl argues that another explanation is that "the brain in specific situations literally gets bored

and starts scaring you" and that if you stare into a mirror for long enough you will see a monster, simply because your brain will tire of staring at its own face and so create something more interesting to look at.

Another possibility is the Troxler effect. Here, the brain when overstimulated will tune out non-relevant parts, filling in the gaps and resting on what you expect to see from a jumble of visual stimuli. It was discovered in 1804 by Ignaz Troxler, a doctor and philosopher. Today the phenomenon is well known and dozens of illusions rely on our brains filling in the data. When we see Bloody Mary in the mirror, it could just be our brains creating her out of reflected light and matter; some of us expect to see her, and therefore we do.

Whatever the truth behind the legend of Bloody Mary, the fear she generates is very real. One only has to mention her name at a guide camp and the children will shriek in terror. She remains one of the most enduring 'scary' legends of all time.

NOTES

1 For example, the films *Urban Legends: Bloody Mary* (2005), *Bloody Mary* (2006), *Dead Mary* (aka *Bloody Mary*, 2007), *The Legend of Bloody Mary* and *Bloody Mary* (2021) as well as a 2005 episode of the series *Supernatural* and a two-part episode of *RL Stine's The Haunting Hour* (2011). Clive Barker's *Candyman* (1992, 2021) is also a splicing of Bloody Mary with other elements of modern urban legend like hook-handed killers.

♦ **REBECCA BATLEY** is an archaeologist, teacher and historian by profession. She has worked for the Museum of London, the Louvre, Wessex Archaeology and EACHTRA. Her work can be found in *G&L Review*, *Ancient History Magazine*, *Medieval Warfare*, *New Scientist* and *Reverb*.



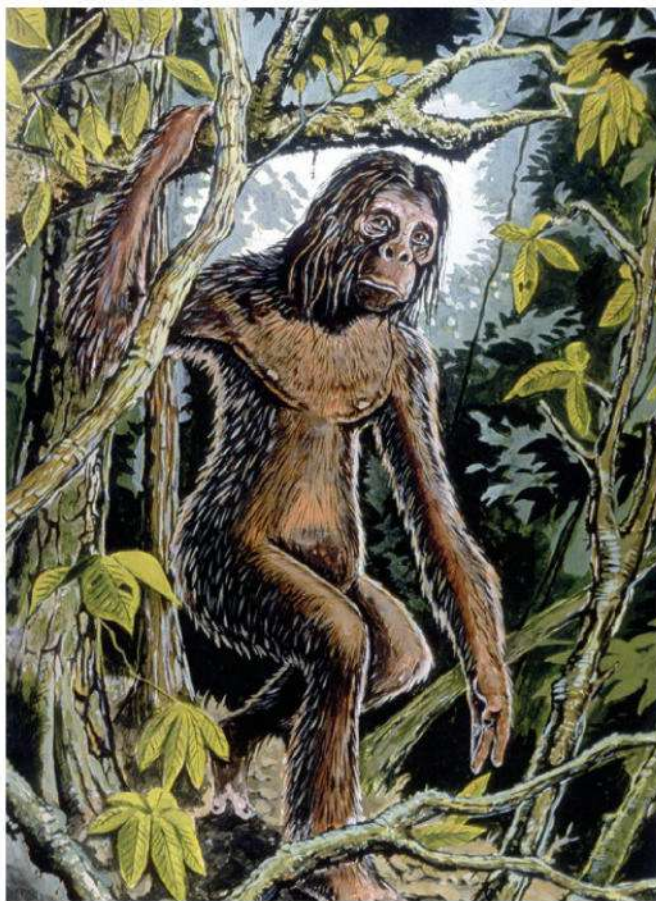
CARRY ON AGAIN UP THE JUNGLE

RICHARD FREEMAN and company return to the rainforests of Sumatra in search of the elusive orang pendek and its mysterious cousin the orang kardil. Apart from money-grubbing officials and malfunctioning gear, what could possibly go wrong?

Thanks to Covid, it had been some time since the Centre for Fortean Zoology (CFZ) had undertaken an expedition. With restrictions lifted, we decided on a return to Sumatra in autumn 2022 – our sixth visit – on the trail of the orang pendek (the ‘short man’ in Indonesian), an elusive upright walking ape (see FT83:19, 176:26, 181:20, 304:20, 398:25. For previous CFZ expeditions to Sumatra, see FT182:32-39, 208:30-34, 266:50-53).

We contacted our Sumatran guide Dally Sandradiputra – trained by our original guide, Sahar Dimus – who would seek out the latest sightings and witnesses and find us places to stay. The team would consist of me, Carl Marshall and Andrew ‘Geordie’ Jackson, along with Dally and the local porters. Carl and Geordie were bringing professional cameras, a drone camera and some new camera traps. The plan was to film the expedition for a documentary feature, a collaboration between the CFZ and Dragonfly Films.

After flying via Doha and Jakarta we finally arrived in the deeply unattractive city of Padang, capital of West Sumatra, where we met Dally, his friend Derry Pandaka and a small crew of porters. We stayed at Derry’s house before the long drive to our first study area. Dally explained that bureaucracy and corruption had run rife since my last trip to Sumatra back in 2013. Now, anyone wanting to carry out research in one of the national parks was charged an extortionate fee; the fee was even higher if cameras were involved. Also the rangers expected backhanders; if one was paid off, he would tell his friends that rich Westerners were in the park, and



**ALI HAD BEEN
HUNTING BEARDED
PIGS IN THE JUNGLE
WHEN HE SAW AN
ORANG PENDEK**

they would roll up one by one expecting money. Due to this, we decided to focus on jungle areas that lay outside official national parks.

We stopped at a rural café in a mountain village where Dally had contacted a witness who had agreed to talk to us. Ali Usman had been hunting bearded pigs in the jungle-swathed mountains above the village in 1981 when he saw an orang pendek. The local name for the creature is *bigau* (not to be confused with *chigau*, a Kerinci name for a supposed unknown big cat that resembles a scimitar-toothed cat). He had seen a grey-haired creature about a metre tall. It walked erect like a man, but had a splayed big toe, a feature clearly seen in orang pendek tracks. Ali had been scared by the creature, believing it to have been manifested by a tiger shaman, and he and his fellow hunters had run back down the mountain. He said that the people from the village often heard the creature’s weird cry, like a strange, high-pitched laugh, but never saw it. This had led them to think that the *bigau* was some sort of ghost.

Ali looked at a series of flash cards I had brought. These were pictures of various apes and reconstructions of prehistoric apes and hominins. Ali picked out *Homo erectus* and *Homo habilis* as the two that most resembled what he had seen, in particular the creature’s face. He also spoke of something in the hills called *harimau tinggi* or ‘tall tiger’. He had trouble explaining what this was, other than being a tiger that moved in a strange way.



PHOTOS: RICHARD FREEMAN

FACING PAGE: An artist's impression of the orang pendek painted by Anthony Wallis. **ABOVE:** Richard Freeman holds up a replica *Homo floresiensis* skull created by Alan Friswell. **BELOW:** Witness Ali Usman, who saw an orang pendek while out in the jungle hunting bearded pigs.

We would return to explore the jungle-covered hills above this village later in the expedition; for the time being, we moved onto the first area of study Dally had selected.

After a long drive we spent the night in a pleasant 'homestay', a holiday dwelling rented out to visitors much like an Airbnb in the UK. Crickets chirped, geckos scurried and bats flitted about in the night. Dally drove to the nearest town and came back with Kentucky Fried Chicken for supper. KFC is very popular in Indonesia and every sizeable town seems to have a branch (or a local knock-off).

INTO THE JUNGLE

Special effects wizard Alan Friswell, who has worked with the legendary Ray Harryhausen (see FT303:26, 56-57), had created for us an exact copy of the skull of *Homo floresiensis*, the tiny hominin unearthed on Flores, Indonesia in 2003 (FT191:16, 194:18, 236:20, 246:18, 252:18, 302:26, 347:12, 359:14, 425:37-41) as a prop for the proposed documentary.

What has this to do with orang pendek? Well, judging by the shape of its prints and the analysis of orang pendek hair, the creature is an ape, most likely a ground-dwelling relation of the orangutans. However, another, totally distinct man-like creature is reported from the same jungles. Orang kardil ('tiny man')

is said to be smaller than the orang pendek with a more human-looking face, long flowing hair on its head and a mostly naked body. It is said to live in small tribes and hunt with poisoned bamboo spears. The father of the late Sahar Dimus encountered a group of them in a remote part of Kernchi in 1981 while trading rice with other tribes. His companion killed one of the little people with a *parang* when he caught it stealing rice from a cooking pot. Dozens of other orang kardil rushed out of the jungle and speared the man to death, but left Sahar's father alone. He had also seen an orang pendek some years previously and it was very different.

Hair analysis by Lars Thomas, an animal hair expert from Copenhagen, points towards the orang pendek being a ground-dwelling relation of the orangutans and clearly an ape. However, we believe the orang kardil is closely related to *Homo floresiensis* and the more recently discovered *Homo luzonensis* from the Philippines. Both of these lived only about 50,000 years ago – an eye-blink in evolutionary terms. Both were thought to be closely related to *Homo habilis*, an African hominin that died out some 1.9 million years ago. It was not known to have left the African continent, but apparently it, or something like it, did. It had a lin-

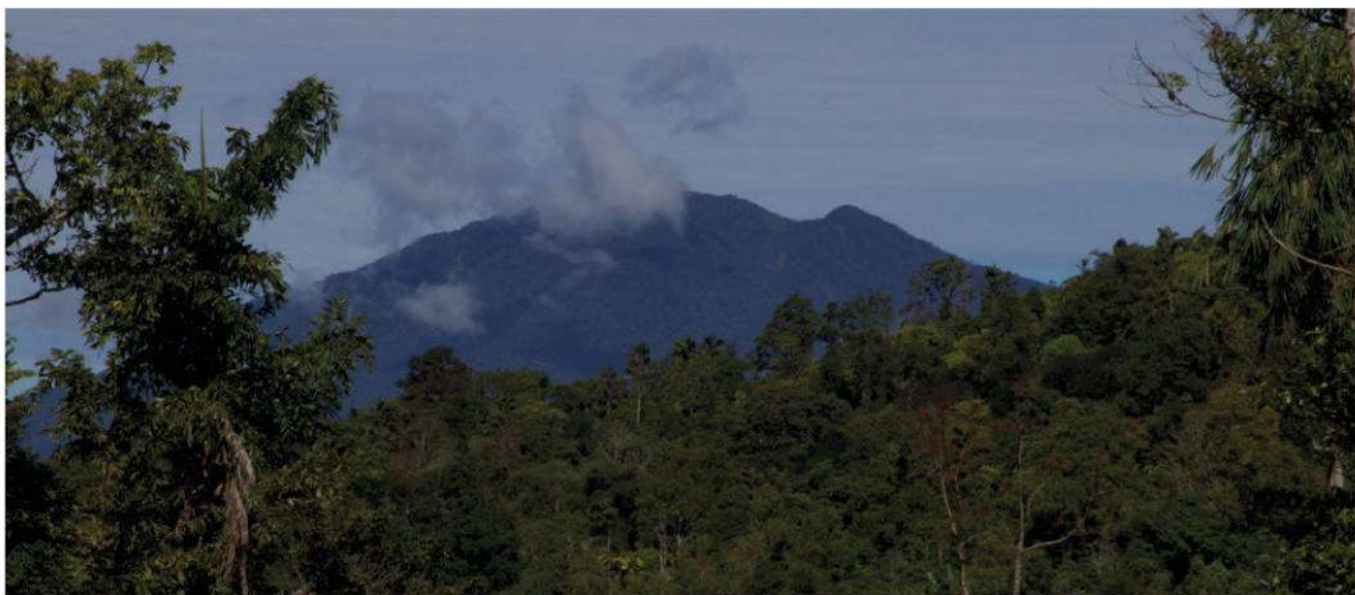
eage that stretched halfway around the world nearly two million years after *Homo habilis* was thought to have become extinct. It must have left other descendants on its migration – was orang kardil one of them?

I had not heard of any new orang kardil sightings, but Dally said he had found some witnesses.

Next day we departed for a narrow strip of jungle around a mesa that towered several hundred feet into the sky. We heard siamang gibbons calling and long tailed macaques were abundant. We made camp for the night, but in the morning it quickly became obvious that the area – only a few hundred metres across and skirting cliffs – could not support a population of large primates and keep them hidden. We decided to move on to the second area. Geordie, though, used the drone to film some magnificent aerial views of the mesa and forest.

After a detour to attend the wedding of one of Dally's work colleagues – where we were made very welcome and allowed to film the festivities – we moved on to another homestay and interviewed its owner, a man named C'un who had seen something strange a few years earlier. The village was smaller and less developed then, with fewer houses and no homestays. One night, after returning from a trip, he heard something splashing in a stream. On investigation he saw a creature frolicking in the water. He described it as white and hairless. It was humanoid and had a head and face





ABOVE: Dense jungle and soaring, forest-swathed peaks in Sumatra. **BELOW:** Our guide, Dally, looking ready to take on even the most terrifying of cryptids.

like an outsized baby, but with no eyebrows. It looked muscular and he likened it to a 'strong baby. It ran away laughing and left small human-like tracks. He called it *anak rote*, meaning 'small boy'. It did not sound like an orang pendek or an orang kardil. If anything it sounded more like a ghost, but I have no idea what C'un saw that night.

IN SEARCH OF ORANG KARDIL

We drove back to the area where we had interviewed Ali Usman. I have decided not to share the details of this location for reasons that will later become apparent.

We camped in the 'garden' area, a semi-cultivated place between the village and the jungle proper. A local farmer allowed us to use an old shack as our base. The porters slept in this, while Dally, Derry and us Brits opted for tents erected under a large, rain-proof sheet.

In the morning we trekked into the jungle. Dally found a track that he thought was from an orang pendek. On first inspection I thought it could have been from a pig-tailed macaque, though it seemed very large. We cast the print and once it had dried out and we had brushed the dirt away it became apparent that no monkey could have made it. The heel was too pronounced and it was too large for even the biggest macaque. It was, though, clearly not from an adult orang pendek. It was about half the size of the prints I had seen before, but clearly the same shape, with the long heel and offset big toe. We were pleased to find such evidence so early on in the expedition.

We set up camera traps baited with pungent durian. On the way back, Geordie almost stumbled into an animal trap on the edge of the garden area. It had been set up to kill bearded pigs, which often attempt to raid crops. It was weight-triggered and armed with a huge spike.

In the early morning, before anybody else



SAM DESCRIBED A CREATURE ABOUT TWO AND A HALF FEET TALL WITH A HUMAN-LIKE FACE

was awake, Carl heard a creature calling. He likened the vocalisation to that of a young gorilla. The animal called just once, and only he heard it.

One of the men from the village, Sam Su-arr, told us of seeing a *bigau* six months previously when he was cutting bamboo in the very area where we were camped. However, from his description, the *bigau* he saw was an orang kardil rather than an orang pendek. The trouble is that different parts of Sumatra have different names for both and sometimes the terms become confused. It seems that the term *bigau* is used for any, small, man-like creature seen in the jungle.

Sam described a creature about two and a half feet (76cm) tall with a very human-like face. Its tiny body was covered in short yellow

hair and it had long red hair on the head that fell down its back to its legs. The creature was carrying a stick. It ran away from him quickly. This description is very different from that of the orang pendek – smaller and more human-like – and Sam produced a crude drawing of the long-haired figure he'd seen.

This is an important case as it is the first sighting of the orang kardil I have heard since Sahar's father's experience in 1981. I had thought that the orang kardil might even have become extinct; during all of my previous expeditions I talked to many orang pendek witnesses, but nobody had seen an orang kardil. In 2013, for example, Chris Killian, Adele Morse and I had interviewed a whole collection of orang pendek witnesses who had gathered at a village below Gunung Tuju. All had seen orang pendek and/or its tracks; all had heard of orang kardil, but none had seen it.

Later that day, we took another path into the jungle. Derry found a track. We had no plaster of Paris with us at the time, so the guides surrounded the track with upright sticks and covered it with leaves to protect it from rain and animal disturbance.

Later Carl, Dally and one of the porters returned with plaster of Paris and made a cast. A closer examination showed it to be a handprint rather than a footprint, almost identical to one we had cast at Gunung Tuju in Kerinci Seblat National Park back in 2011. It did not resemble the handprint of an orangutan, which has a tiny thumb and long fingers, having a fairly large thumb and thick, sausage-like fingers. It looked more like the hand print of a small gorilla than that of an orangutan.

Another local man, Afrizal Depi, who was the owner of the land, told us of an encounter with a *bigau* back in 2005. What he saw was once again clearly an orang kardil rather than an orang pendek. He had been hunting pigs with dogs when he saw the creature.

He said it was just over two feet (60cm) tall, human-like and had long red hair. It appeared to be following the pigs and he did not see its face.

There is a tradition in Sumatra, going back decades, that the orang kardil either herds or hunts wild pigs. It may be that they follow bearded pigs to forage for the fruit the pigs shake from bushes or the tubers they dig up.

Afrizal also told us of a ritual that the local people used to perform to honour the *bigau* before a pig hunt. They believed that the *bigau* could control pigs and either send them to hunters or withhold them. Offerings of flour and rice were left out for it. These days, the practice has died out.

BULLS AND TIGERS

The next day we came down from the mountains for the day to film a bull race. Crowds from villages all over the area had gathered to see the event and local vendors had set up stalls selling all kinds of food, clothes and even children's toys. The bull race itself was a kind of bizarre water skiing. It took place in swampy paddy fields. Two zebu cattle are yoked to a pair of wooden frames. The rider holds the reins and places a foot in each of the boat-shaped frames before encouraging the cattle to run across the paddy field as he skis across the mud behind them. At one point, a pair of bulls swerved out of the field at a right angle and burst through the door of a nearby house. The back door flew open and the owner was tossed out by the bulls as they thundered through his dwelling and out the back door.

When we got back to the village, Dally was questioned by the local police. Somebody had told them about a group of Westerners camping in the area and they wanted to charge us a fee for staying in the jungle. Dally told them that they had absolutely no right to do that as we were camped on private land.

On the following day we took another path into the jungle beyond where we had found the prints, penetrating deeper into the rainforest than before. The track was narrow, slippery and treacherous. In places the jungle fell away into deep gorges. We left



PHOTOS: RICHARD FREEMAN

ABOVE: Interviewing a pair of witnesses who shared stories of a ritual that local people once performed to honour the *bigau* before a pig hunt. **BELOW:** A strange handprint which, when cast, revealed a large thumb.

camera traps baited with durian at various spots, including a waterfall at the end of the trail.

On the way back, Geordie had pulled ahead on the trail; Dally, Carl and myself were well behind. Then the distinctive call of the orang pendek rang out. It is best described as a high pitched, chattering laugh "HO-HO-HO..."

"That is the orang pendek," breathed Dally.

Twice more the call rang out. It seemed to be coming from behind a stand of bamboo and no more than 20-30 feet (6-9m) away. Carl suggested that he run behind the bamboo and try to flush the animal out so I could film it. I agreed and Carl scrambled across a little creek and up a slope into the vegetation.

He caught a glimpse of a metre-tall creature with reddish brown hair and a patch of dark hair towards the top. He did not see its face as the animal was facing away from him. Instead of running around the stand of bamboo, it took off straight into the jungle. Carl had it in view for only a couple of seconds.

Had I run round the bamboo stand myself, I would have caught whatever it was on film. We searched for any dropped hair but found none. The ground was covered in vegetation

and roots and not suitable for preserving tracks. We returned to camp with a mixture of excitement and disappointment.

We were also getting worried about the number of hunters passing through. Many carried guns and had hunting dogs. Apparently they were after bearded pigs. As Muslims, they did not eat pork but killed the pigs anyway, for sport, and fed them to the dogs. Dally thought that they might steal our camera traps if they saw them.

We decided to gather up the traps before they were taken. The three we had set up first were all intact. The second set had a camera missing. Sam Suarr thought that the *harimau tinggi* had stolen the camera. He seemed to believe it was some kind of were-tiger. Obviously, it had been stolen by poachers or hunters. Reluctantly we decided to move on from the area.

We took the long trip back to Padang and Derry's house, doing our best to avoid Indonesia's notoriously dangerous drivers and the mopeds that are everywhere. We avoided crashes, often by inches, more times than I care to recall. By the time we approached Padang it was dark.

Back at Derry's house we now had time to check the pictures on the camera traps. Most showed nothing more exciting than leaves moving or a persistent fly buzzing about. But one camera held a surprise: two stills and a sequence of film of an adult female Sumatran tiger! The area in which the images were taken is outside of the known range of the species. And this is why I am keeping quiet about the exact location: it is believed that there are only about 600 remaining Sumatran tigers. Our discovery could represent an unknown population. It would also seem to suggest that the cryptid *harimau tinggi* is based on a biological reality.

COVERT OPERATIONS

We next planned to make a number of clandestine in-and-out trips – no overnight camping – into Kerinci Seblat National Park to set up cameras and look for witnesses. We took a nine-hour drive to Dally's house in Sungai Penuh, which we would use as a base.





ABOVE LEFT: The Sumatran tiger caught on a camera trap – although the team's inability to programme the device properly means the date and time are completely wrong. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A selection of Dally's large collection of plastercasts of orang pendek tracks – he kindly donated two to the CFZ.

Dally had a large collection of plastercasts from prints left by orang pendek and other cryptids from Kerinci and West Sumatra. Some were classic orang pendek tracks just like the ones I have seen many times before, with the splayed big toe and long heel; one, though, was twice the size of an average specimen and must have come from a huge individual. Other tracks looked more like those of a yeti – much more massive and of a different shape; another appeared to be that of a tiger, but it was colossal and, again, must have represented a titanic individual. Dally said the local people thought the track was made by a *tanauk*, a huge tiger-like creature with a flat face. I have long thought that some cryptids could be based on freak individuals from known species that grow beyond the normal size, like giant crocodiles and anacondas. Other tracks were clearly those of a sun bear, where the animal had trodden with its back paws in the prints from its front paws, creating the illusion of a bigger track. Dally was kind enough to donate a couple of orang pendek prints to the CFZ collection.

On our first trip to Kerinci National Park we stopped off at a small village where a man told us that villagers had heard its strange call, but had not seen the creature that made it; he thought it must, therefore, be a ghost. A young man named Egi had actually seen the orang pendek in 2021, about a mile from the village. It had been raining at the time and he saw a metre-tall humanoid creature with brownish red hair running away from him into the jungle. He did not see its face. It made no noise, so he too thought it was a ghost; later, however, he found classic orang pendek tracks that he cast and sent to Dally. I asked him how a 'ghost' could leave tracks and he admitted to being confused about it.

Local superstition influenced his interpretation of what he saw. This can differ wildly from place to place. In some areas no supernatural attributes are given to orang

I ASKED HIM HOW A GHOST COULD LEAVE TRACKS AND HE ADMITTED TO BEING CONFUSED

pendek and it is thought of as an animal. In other villages, people think it is a spirit.

The next day we returned to set up several clandestine camera traps, all baited with smelly durian. One of the areas was a slope leading to a cliff that dropped several hundred feet. Carl almost fell down the slope while setting up a camera. It was in this area that Dally had seen an orang pendek just a year before. Like Egi, he saw the creature from the back as it dashed off into the jungle. It was reddish brown in colour and had apparently taken some fruit he had left out.

The next few days were taken up by getting stock footage of the jungle and animals for the documentary. Then we returned to pick up the cameras. As we retrieved one that was near a stream, close to a road, a car drew up and two rangers appeared and asked Dally what we were doing. Dally simply said we were driving through the area and had stopped to photograph monkeys. The rangers seemed more interested in taking selfies with us and did not suspect that we had been setting up camera traps in the park. After they finally left we retrieved the cameras and headed back to Sungai Penuh. Along the way we noticed tall tower-like structures with tiny windows. These seemed common in the larger villages. Dally explained that these were roosts for brown rumped swiftlets – the birds whose nests are used in bird's nest soup. The nests themselves are made from

the bird's hardened saliva and are collected early in the breeding season, before birds lay their eggs; they then build a second nest and are allowed to raise their brood so they will return the following year. In some cases, recordings of tweeting swiftlets are played to encourage them to nest.

Back at Dally's house we checked the pictures. One camera had malfunctioned and showed nothing at all; the other, just insects and vegetation moved by the wind. Oddly, the bait had been taken but whatever took it did not show up on camera – despite the equipment having been tested in the UK before we left. Some files were corrupted and Geordie said he would try to retrieve these when we got back to England.

A whole mountain of things went wrong on this trip: corruption and red tape, stolen equipment, cameras going wrong despite testing; and it was frustrating that I missed seeing a probable orang pendek by mere seconds due to one bad decision. Nevertheless, we managed to collect some important data.

We left two camera traps with Dally. The plan was to wait a couple of months, then return to the area where we photographed the tiger. Dally will put up the traps and leave them there for months rather than days in the hope of filming the orang pendek. He will only need to return every few months to replace the batteries and check the images on the cards. This may well be the best way forwards with the search for orang pendek in Sumatra. In the future we will be looking into obtaining camera traps with long-life batteries, linked to a satellite so we can leave them in situ for years and check the photographs weekly.

Perhaps we could even disguise them as rocks or tree stumps...

◆ RICHARD FREEMAN is a cryptozoologist, writer and the zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology.

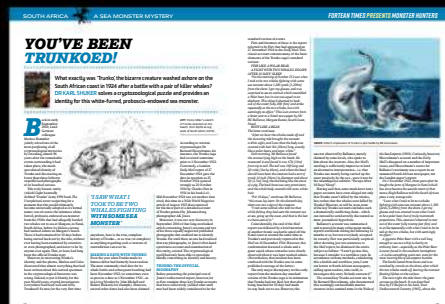


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Donating my UFO files

PHILIP MANTLE says it's never too soon to plan for the future when it comes to UFO collections.

It was 1980 when I first dipped my toes into the muddy waters that we call ufology. Living just outside the city of Leeds in West Yorkshire I had been notified of the formation of a new UFO group. This was the Yorkshire UFO Society (YUFOS). This small group was set up by brothers Graham and Mark Birdsell. After spending eight years with YUFOS I helped form the Independent UFO Network (IUN) and I also joined both the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA) and the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON).

I didn't just join these various organisations, but became an active UFO investigator/researcher almost from day one. For BUFORA, for example, I helped with various roles – Press Officer, Conference Organiser and Director of Investigations. By the late 1990s I had decided to continue my investigations on my own, liaising with colleagues around the world. I also edited several UFO magazines.

As a result, of all this work over the years, by 2023 I had accumulated a small archive of UFO material. This included some of my UFO sighting investigations, alien abduction case files and related research compiled for my 1994 book *Without Consent* (written with Carl Nagaitis), the files from my investigation into the 'alien autopsy' film (FT395:32-36) including a cannister from the hoax with film still in it. I had hundreds of photos and 35mm slides, a selection of magazines and newsletters and some unique items.

My files were not as extensive as they should have been, as some



LEFT: David Marler in the NUFOHRC archive in New Mexico.

By 2023 I had accumulated a small archive of UFO material

were lost down the years, but I treasured them and wondered what would happen to them when I was gone. Since 1999 I have suffered from a life-threatening heart condition that cannot be cured. Longevity in the male side of my family isn't great: my father died aged 48, my only brother aged 63 and I had a heart attack aged 41 in 1999. So what should I do with my files? My wife and family are not interested in ufology, so the material is of no use to them. I could pass them on to a colleague, but they too would face the same dilemma at some stage. Here in the UK there is no academic institution that would

accept them, so I had to look elsewhere.

I have known David Marler, based in New Mexico, for a number of years and was aware of his extensive archive. David built an extension to his house at his own expense to house this ever-growing collection. In 2022, he made me aware that he and a number of colleagues were in the process of establishing the non-profit National UFO Historical Records Center (NUFOHRC). To me this sounded like the ideal place to house my humble collection.

David and I discussed this, and I offered him my files. Happily, these were despatched in March 2023 and arrived safely in New Mexico. I now no longer have to worry about what will happen to them when I die. I also have a collection of UFO memorabilia and UFO books. I'll keep hold of these for now, but the day will come when they are looking for a home as well.

David Marler put a post on social media after he had received my files:

"Special thanks to Philip Mantle for the donation of his UFO research files to the National UFO Historical Records Center which just arrived from the UK. We are honored to preserve his legacy. This is one of over a dozen such collections destined to arrive here over the course of the next year. We are in the process of securing city, county, State, and Federal money to acquire a freestanding building. Meetings currently underway."

As you can see, there are big plans for the National UFO Historical Records Center and I'm glad to hear it.

So if you have an archive or collection of UFO data or related materials, large or small, and you're concerned about its future fate, then perhaps you should consider doing the same as me. Donate it free of charge to someone like David Marler and NUFOHRC or to the Archives for the Unexplained (AFU) in Sweden, which preserves UFO-related memorabilia, books and magazines (see FT330:46-49, 389:29).

But I would stress that you really should not leave it until it is too late. I have seen unique UFO data thrown away as rubbish after a researcher has passed on. Please do not let that happen to your UFO material – it is too precious to lose.

You can find out more about NUFOHRC at <https://nufohrc.org/> and about the AFU at <https://afu.se>.

➡ **PHILIP MANTLE** is a long-standing UFO researcher. He was formerly the Director of Investigations for the British UFO Research Association and the MUFON Representative for England. He is the founder of Flying Disk Press and can be contacted at philip.mantle@gmail.com.

Now you don't see it, now you do...

MARK FOX attempts to sort sense from sensationalism in Netflix's new documentary *MH370: The Plane That Disappeared*.

Marking the ninth anniversary of the disappearance of flight MH370, Netflix's three-part investigation of the factors underlying the biggest aviation mystery of all time is curiously titled. For, as the series makes clear, it is the fact that MH370 reappeared that makes the case so baffling. And herein lies a tale...

The circumstances, well-known nine years on, are these. MH370, a Malaysian 777-200 aircraft flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, vanished on 8 March 2014 after sending a final, routine, sign-off message to Kuala Lumpur Air Traffic Control. It was an apparently routine red eye flight until its arrival at waypoint IGARI at the boundary between Malaysian and Vietnamese Air Traffic Control space. And here, the plane... well, disappeared...

Thus far the series, then, seems well-named. But here's the twist. Later, at 18.25 UTC, having apparently turned back and flown over Malaysian territory at more-or-less right-angles to its intended route, flight MH370 reappeared. More specifically, having apparently been turned off, the satellite communication system was turned back on again, making the plane visible once more. By whom or for what reason is unknown. After all, having taken a plane and made it, to all intents and purposes, invisible, why would you 'de-cloak' it again? Whatever the reason, MH370 reappeared: at least to UK satellite company INMARSAT, who were able retrospectively to reconstruct a flight path which ended at a point in the Southern



Indian Ocean several hours after the initial disappearance at IGARI.

I was one of a sizeable number of people who followed the case from the beginning. We juggled theories online: high-tech web-sleuths trying to work out what could possibly have happened. Many of us ended up swapping comments on Jeff Wise's blog; and, indeed, Wise takes up the lion's share of the interview time across the three parts of the Netflix documentary, along with researcher Florence De Changy, wreckage-hunter and 'adventurer' Blaine Gibson, aviation expert Mike Exner and INMARSAT executive Mark Dickinson. It sounds like a stellar line-up, but research reveals that several MH370 experts flatly refused to appear, including Richard Godfrey, whose WSPR tracing technology has in recent years confirmed and refined much of the existing tracking originally produced by INMARSAT. Godfrey's criticism, that the series is "sensationalist and speculative", has been echoed by others, and during the documentary itself Mike Exner

Some of the assertions made in the series do point to genuine puzzles



shows himself to be critical of Wise and De Changy ("These are people who do not understand the facts or the data"), while Mark Dickinson declares it "hurtful" that INMARSAT should be accused of manipulating data in ways that some, including some

of the series' participants, have suggested.

In truth, the series failed to add anything we didn't already know. And critics who have been disdainful of its 'sensationalist' tone have not always been careful enough to determine exactly what it contains. For example: the charge that INMARSAT somehow fabricated their own data doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Jeff Wise, for example, makes clear during the second episode that any 'spoofing' that was done was a result of actions carried out by the perpetrators themselves in the plane's avionics bay: accessible, incredibly, by anybody in the aircraft via a hatch situated next to the forward galley (and hence on the passenger side of the cockpit door). Further, in the months following the vanishing of MH370 some INMARSAT employees showed themselves to have been open to the possibility that they had been, somehow, spoofed. In a BBC interview in the aftermath of the disappearance, for example, INMARSAT engineer Alan Schuster-Bruce admitted that one of the first concerns they'd had was that the



NETFLIX

ABOVE: Police carry a piece of debris from an unidentified aircraft found on the island of La Réunion. BELOW: Aviation writer and MH370 researcher Jeff Wise.

data trail “could just be a big hoax that someone... played on INMARSAT.” INMARSAT’s VP for aviation, David Coiley, was similarly guarded, asserting that the company was “confident that this data is correct *assuming that there is no way this data has been spoofed*” (my emphasis). Despite later company comments rowing back from the ‘spoof’ possibility, it is clear that in the aftermath of the disappearance there were those within the company who had considered the possibility of a spoof: but one done *to* them, not – obviously – *by* them.

Elsewhere, some of the assertions made during the series point to genuine puzzles: questions that have yet to receive convincing answers. One ‘breakthrough’ moment in the investigation occurred on 29 July 2015 when the right wing flaperon was found on a beach on the French island of Réunion. While drift modelling appeared to show that this discovery was consistent with the piece having started its sea journey in part of the Southern Indian Ocean where

the INMARSAT data revealed the plane’s terminus to have been, the flaperon itself presented genuine puzzles: not least its missing identification plate. De Changy rightly draws attention to this during the Netflix series. The identification plates are designed to stay in place during the harshest of circumstances, but are routinely removed when an aircraft is broken up. It is not sensationalist to point out the oddity of the Réunion flaperon missing such a part.

Neither is it sensationalist to point out, as Jeff Wise did, the sheer statistical improbability of Malaysian Airlines having lost two 777s in rapid succession in 2014: first MH370 on 8 March and then MH17, shot down over the Donbass region of Ukraine on 17 July. This could, of course, just have been a ‘coincidence’, but given the mass of

uncertainty which remains over the first incident, it seems quite reasonable to probe for a possible link between that and the second one. Given its concern to explore the MH370 mystery, the series devotes relatively little attention to MH17, yet the exploration of some sort of connection might have yielded something interesting. Perhaps a Ukrainian connection links both tragedies. There is nothing sensationalist in at least suggesting such a thing.

Nine years on, the mystery of MH370, largely remains. As the series makes clear, a number of ocean searches have been undertaken – some at the searchers’ own expense – but the only wreckage ‘finds’ remain those that have resulted from the pieces being washed up on beaches. The relatively small size of most of these suggests that, whatever the cause of MH370’s disappearance, its end was a catastrophic

one. In the meantime, as the series again makes clear, the relatives and friends of those on board remain in limbo, unable to begin the process of grief and closure, as lost in their own way as those that boarded the tragic flight at Kuala Lumpur. And this, desperately sad as it is to watch, is the real strength of *MH370: The Plane That Disappeared*: a reminder that the victims of this tragedy extend far beyond the souls that perished on board.

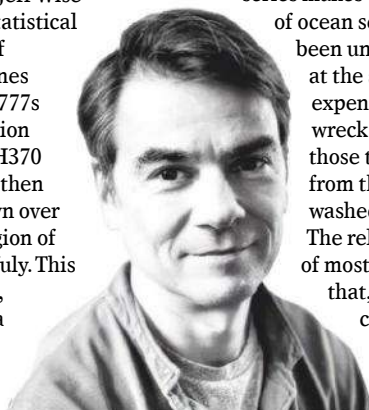
For previous coverage of Flight MH370, see FT345:12, 352:8, 348:69, 371:74-75, 407:53.

Further Reading

Jeff Wise, *The Taking of MH370*, The Yellow Cabin Press, 2019.

MH370: The Plane That Disappeared is available to watch on Netflix.

♦ MARK FOX is an independent researcher, speaker, and writer. His various books explore the fields of religion, spirituality and the paranormal and he can be found at www.markfox.co.uk.

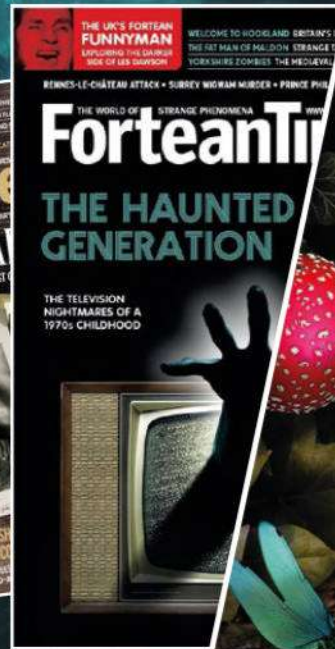


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The perfumed cesspit

Crowley's 'dear vile London' was peopled with a bohemian demi-monde of artists, writers, courtesans, catamites, actresses, ragged ragtime girls, acolytes, wizards, swamis and more, says **Nina Antonia**

City of the Beast

The London of Aleister Crowley

Phil Baker

Strange Attractor Press 2022

Pb, 280pp, £21, ISBN 9781913689322

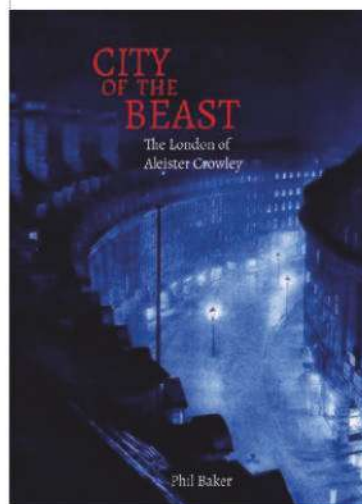
Like a literary showman, author Phil Baker pulls back a heavy scarlet curtain embroidered with occult symbols to present the London of Aleister Crowley's decadent æon. For Crowley, a man of privilege with a handsome inheritance, the city was a playground of delight, vice, mystery and Magick, peopled with a bohemian demi-monde; artists, writers, courtesans, catamites, actresses, ragged ragtime girls, acolytes, wizards, swamis, army men gone astray and society hostesses.

Secondhand book shops teemed with affordable antiquarian treasures whilst opium, cocaine and magical elixirs to order could be purchased at Crowley's most frequented pharmacy, Lowe's: "My favourite rendezvous was a little chemist's shop in Stafford Street managed by a man named EP Whineray, one of the most remarkable and fascinating men that I have ever met. He knew all the secrets of London."

Crowley's character develops as we follow his adventures as a bon-viveur and black magician who craved infamy and found it. His legacy includes not entirely flattering pen-portraits in the novels of Somerset Maugham (*The Magician*) and Antony Powell (*A Dance to the Music of Time*). Dispensing with the usual hagiography that has since sprung up around "The Beast 666", Powell described Crowley as a "sinister if gifted buffoon".

The son of fervent Plymouth Brethren, Crowley's self-created belief system which he called

Magick was reactionary: if Jesus said turn the other cheek, The Beast suggests that both cheeks be slapped. Though Crowley was a serious student of the black arts, his manifesto *The Book of the Law* could only have been written by a person of wealth with deeply conservative roots, hence he simply turns Christianity on its head: "Stamp down the wretched and the weak, this is the law of the strong." He was an educated upper class male in the late Victorian era; life was his for the taking and he grabbed it with both pudgy hands. Needless to say, The Beast could wolf down the hottest curries without breaking into a sweat; such are



the perks of being a Black Magician. Though I dislike Crowley as a person, *City of the Beast* is hugely entertaining and meticulously researched, pleasing to both the beginner in Crowleyanity and those more familiar with "The King of Depravity" as one tabloid was to label him.

Delivered in slender but plentiful sections, the book commences with the explorer Richard Burton's tomb, a granite

Crowley's appetites were savage and his lust all-consuming; he made a ritual of every sex act

facsimile of an Arabian tent, in the cemetery of St Mary Magdalene in sleepy Mortlake. Burton's daring exploits and documentation of sexual taboos made him a hero to the young Aleister, who was to push at life's boundaries as if they were prison bars to be broken. (Burton requested that his more extreme writings be destroyed on his death, although his wife is often blamed for making cinders of her husband's essays.) The Beast's occult studies were to take him around the world, to dusty magnificent Egypt, brash America and his own Abbey of Thelema in Sicily, a tad less grand than it sounds, although Crowley's grandiosity would have overshadowed what was little more than an early forerunner of an esoteric hippy commune, albeit one with a demonic mural on the wall.

Aleister Crowley was a visionary, but his appetites were savage and his lust all-consuming, while he made a ritual of every sex act. Unfortunately, his amatory-Magickal experiments were to take their toll on the vulnerable women he cast in the interchangeable role of his Scarlet Woman, an all-seasons Whore of Babylon whom he imbued with supernatural prowess. Leah Hirsig, a pale, rather delicate-looking former schoolteacher, was Crowley's Scarlet Woman at Thelema. Baker notes: "She was an extraordinary woman in her own right, but whom a High Court judge might describe as

depraved; she was happy to shit on him (Crowley) have sex with a goat and sexually abuse her children." The unasked question is what would a High Court Judge have made of Crowley's propensity for violence towards his partners (female and male) and predatory behaviour? The slender Hirsig would have been easy prey, just like her two-year-old son whom The Beast affectionately daubed his "Gany-mede" after he had sex with the toddler. For many, Crowley's appeal is in his liberation from social norms, but his cruelty is rarely explored, the exception being Jean Overton Fuller's *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg*. Fuller's account of the poet Neuburg's relationship with Crowley captures the more malevolent aspects of The Beast's character of whom she also notes: "If ever a man went off his head through the occult sciences, it was Crowley." Strangely or perhaps not, it is always the Magic/k that ends up mastering the Magician and the Beast was no exception. For many, however, Crowley remains a figure of dark romance, as portrayed by Phil Baker in this ornate yet informative tome.

Despite his sojourns abroad, Crowley always returned to the perfumed cesspit which he called "Dear vile London". There are amusing cameos aplenty, including an incident with Crowley's mother who took too long reading the menu when dining with him at Simpsons on the Strand. Impatiently grabbing the menu from his mother's hand, Crowley exclaimed: "You can have boiled toads, Mother, or fried Jesus," like a scene from a blasphemous episode of *The Addams Family*. No wonder Leah Hirsig became a Catholic.

★★★★★

The garden of weird

A beautifully illustrated and intelligent study of Bosch's masterpiece, finds **Phil Baker**

Hieronymus Bosch

Time and Transformation in the Garden of Earthly Delights

Margaret D Carroll

Yale University Press 2022

Hb, 177pp, £25, ISBN 9780300255324

The sheer weirdness of Bosch has always mystified viewers, with his naked couples in egg-like transparent membranes, hollow tree-man, and a pair of ears sprouting a knife; the work of Bruegel, a few decades later and clearly influenced, seems folksy and down-to-earth in comparison.

It has led people to view

Bosch as a proto-surrealist (a problematic ahistorical idea) or as the purveyor of some encoded meaning, like the now discredited theory that he was a member of a permissive heretical sect, the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit, and that his work depicts their beliefs.

Margaret Carroll's book is an in-depth study of just one work, Bosch's triptych masterpiece *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c.1495-1505, in the Prado). She reads it as a cosmological and scientifically curious history of the world with special attention to the process of time and change itself; what the later Renaissance poet Spenser, in Britain, would have called "mutabilitie".

Along the way she pays interesting attention to details from illuminated manuscripts, and to the less well-known outer casing of the triptych, with its

plainer grisaille panels showing the Creation.

Carroll's more social discussion shows the familiar interests of US academia, with a keen eye for racial difference and same-sex relationships. There are also flashes of an ecological consciousness that feels slightly anachronistic, with the whole Earth as a "nurturing organism" and "premonitions ... of ecological catastrophe".

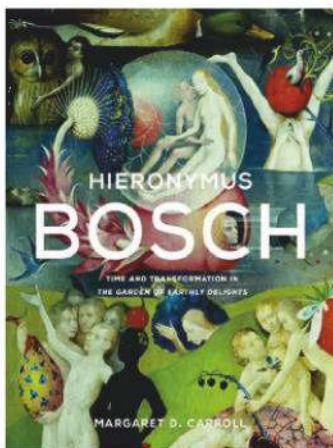
The discussion is never less than intelligent, although the overall thesis about time is not quite as radical and high-concept as the packaging suggests. There is a general consensus that the work is contextually framed by the creation of the world on the

shutters, and reads from left to right in three temporal stages: Adam and Eve; the central "earthly delights" section, whether read as a paradise or something more tainted and ambivalent; and the final dark apocalypse.

This is a beautifully illustrated book and the irreducible strangeness of the work shines out, with its biomorphic pink towers, at once organ-like and plant-like, and its steely-blue globes, one with giant screws protruding like some sort of war engine, together with the cavortings of its teeming human and animal cast. It is inescapably fascinating, but with few certainties.

French critic Michel de Certeau, in "The Garden: Delirium and Delights of Hieronymus Bosch", has argued it was painted to stop the viewer settling on any fixed meaning: "The secret of The Garden is to make you believe that it possesses some sayable secret."

★★★★★



Interview with a Wizard

Peter J Carroll

Ian Blumberg-Engel

Mandrake 2022

Hb, 320pp, £25, ISBN 9781914153150

Peter Carroll – author of *Liber Null* (1978), *Psychonaut* (1982) and *Liber Kaos* (1992), the foundational texts of Chaos magic, and co-founder of the Illuminates of Thanateros (IOT), an order of paradigm-shifting postmodern magi – undergoes a "chat show" interrogation in this volume of 12 interviews by Ian Blumberg-Engel.

Carroll is no shrinking violet when it comes to opining, and many familiar subjects – Aleister Crowley, Austin Osman Spare, drugs and chaos magic – are covered throughout with a degree of predictability and familiarity. However, it is the material documenting his adolescence and school days, his life in London and India and his initial exposure to magic through his involvement with the magazines *New Equinox*, *Lamp of Thoth* and *Chaos International* that hold more interest.

Through his association with such personalities as the "infamous" Gerald Suster, prankster extraordinaire Robert Anton Wilson and the enigmatic Charly Brewster we gain an insight into a select milieu of magical mavericks.

Following the financial success of Ray Sherwin, a fellow chaos theorist and magical partner, we discover that Carroll followed suit in using magic to pursue a successful career in business; a move which possibly accounts for his strident libertarian views on gender, Brexit and the Monarchy. Carroll's aversion to orthodoxy in all its shapes and forms takes on a political dimension when asked about his socio-economic theories of the Rotating Steady State Economy and Universal Basic Income. For those with an investment in all things "chaos" the structure and ritual activities of the IOT is considered, its evolution and ambitions, and its subsequent collapse following the "Ice War".

For many, this may be the "red meat" of the interviews, but it

is Carroll's exposition of his Hypersphere Cosmology – a radical alternative to existing cosmological models – and his research into quantum theories of consciousness and magic that held my interest. The technically demanding arguments he presents may prove off-putting to those unfamiliar with the subject area, but are well worth the effort and a welcome diversion from Carroll's occasionally tendentious pontification.

The repetition of certain subjects throughout the interviews along with a reluctance to fully interrogate Carroll's ideas and statements is a weakness, but that said the book does offer an insight into a contemporary magical thinker who refuses to kowtow to quotidian reality.

Chris Hill

★★★★★

Science Illustration

A History of Visual Knowledge from the 15th Century to Today

ed. Anna Escardo & Julius Wiedemann

Taschen 2022

Hb, 436pp, £60, ISBN 9783836573320

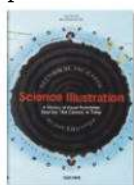
This book has just about the most eclectic range of illustrations I have ever seen in one work. Starting with 15th-century treatises on medicinal plants, it takes the reader on a chronological visual odyssey from most scientific fields right through to photoreal profiles of a male *Homo longi*, an ancient human species known from a single skull only published in China in 2021 after decades of concealment by the labourer who found it. *Homo longi* opposes chemical diagrams identifying new chemical structures in frozen water, images as aesthetically diverse as is possible.

The diversity and breadth of the material covered is what counts here, not the depth of its explanation. The text for the images (in English, French and German) is bare-bones, and there can be up to a third of a page of empty space, depending on the dimensions of the images. A better balance between the designer and the author, allowing for more text, could have benefited the work.

But the illustrations are really where it's at: just tremendously gorgeous, intricate and precise. Full-page reproductions include fly agaric mushrooms by Mordecai



Cubitt Cooke (1894); a map of Islandia from Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1595), its seas teeming with fantastic creatures; White-margined Nightshade leaves engraved by Benjamin Fawcett in 1870; the Human Genome Map of 1990; John James Audobon's early 19th-century illustrations of great auks and ivory billed woodpeckers from his stupendously



valuable *The Birds of America*; the first colour lithographs of bullet wounds (1864) and A Schmitson's colour portrait of

a man who committed suicide with an "old rope" tied five times around his neck; plans of an electric airship flown in France; full-colour mutant flies; extremophiles. Monochrome images (around half of the overall selection) include plans, apparatus, charts, technical drawings, anatomicals, notebook pages, geometries, botany, maps.

In 400-plus pages of profound, ravishing, horrifying, beguiling, mysterious glimpses into scientific enquiry, Taschen have excelled at producing a selection of images that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive or impossible to find in printed form.

Jerry Glover
★★★★★

A Short History of Tomb-Raiding

The Epic Hunt for Egypt's Treasures

Maria Golia

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 304pp, £20, ISBN 9781789146295

I trained as an archaeologist, and it is hard to put that to one side when reviewing a book about people who take artefacts out of archaeological contexts for profit. Taking that into account I found *A Short History of Tomb-Raiding* intriguing, informed and entertaining, not because it confirmed my biases, but because it challenged them.

The removal of artefacts from tombs has a long history in Egypt, dating to when the first burials went into the ground accompanied by worldly riches. Maria Golia captures that breadth of history in an incredibly accessible way. Egyptian society has

changed many times and Golia explores the way the context of plundering the tombs has altered over the years, whether under the rule of Mamluks or colonial rule.

What is especially powerful here is the way Golia explores the story of the tomb raiders through an understanding of class, whether the class distinctions continuing after death in the elitist world of the New Kingdom, the relationship between artefact hunters and 19th-century antiquarians, or the more contemporary relationship between wealth and the ability to marry in Egypt.

Golia also shows how raiding tombs of the rich was a way to redress the imbalance between rich and poor in life by redistributing the riches in death. As she says: "The truth of society lies in its contradictions, not its idealised self image." Her book side-steps the presentation various versions of Egypt wanted the world to see, to get to the reality of life in the shadow of the tombs.

Sometimes tomb robbing is extremely transgressive, punished by executions, at other times formalised, for example under the Mamluk ruler Ahmad Ibn Tulun who codified treasure hunting along the lines of a craft guild. Throughout, the character of communities is beautifully captured, especially



the community of Gurna, and this is where Golia's writing excels.

I would have liked to see comparisons with artefact hunting in European settings such as barrow digging and the use of Roman stone buildings in the UK as standing quarries, but the history of treasure hunting in Egypt is a vast enough topic to tackle on its own.

Probably of most interest to fortune hunters is the role of the occult in treasure hunting, and the way this opened avenues for comment to exploit the vulnerable (as described in the 13th-century *Book of the Charlatans*).

Golia explores a vast and complex subject with clarity and insight, managing to understand the historical specificity of treasure hunting without becoming sentimental about the subject in a book that is a great entry point to this fascinating topic.

Steve Toase
★★★★★

Dressing Up

A History of Fancy Dress in Britain

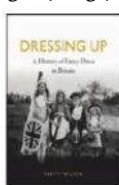
Verity Wilson

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 351pp, £25, ISBN 9781789145298

The British have long loved to dress up as anything under the sun: aviators, cabbages, council houses or even cleaning products. Just give them the excuse of a ball, pageant, parade, ritual, military victory, coronation or prize. We know all about it because they recorded the events in photographs and newspaper reports.

The 144 illustrations in Verity Wilson's accessible book show the British being effortlessly surreal as only they know how. The all-male squads of the Shetland Up Helly Aa, a revived fire festival, pose for the camera as tennis girls, frogs, Dalmatians and scarlet



fever microbes.

Young women sport the winged "jazz trousers" of the 20s. Children are dressed as "Peace" or a bar of Sunlight soap. The titled threw grand fancy dress balls, and the lower orders copied, with civic children's parties or home tableaux "mimicking famous oil paintings". Pageants and tableaux vivants with a message were staged by Christian missionaries and the Rational Dress Society. Exotic costumes veered between "the authentic and the truly bogus".

Chapters cover carnivals, medical students' rags, celebrations and suppliers. Wilson sides with over-tired servants against the Duchess of Devonshire, whose extravagant bash expressed "arrogant hauteur". Men gayed the suffragettes, but girls fought back as miners – they were all "playing with gender identity". It's rather like a Time Team dig where everything is "high-status" or "shows off your wealth". But there are more penetrating insights: fancy dress echoed current fashions, and costumes with an "indeterminate Eastern flavour" gave an excuse to abandon corsets.

Wilson presents a kaleidoscope of liberating alter egos, and relives the days when we had to make our own fun entering a "decorated bicycle" contest or posing as a "living statue". Handy tips: "Rowntree's Clear Gums in red and green" can stand in for rubies and emeralds, and crepe paper lends itself to tiered skirts.

After this exhaustive account, you may feel relieved that you are not back in 1897, getting into the spirit of things, being a good sport and joining a troupe masquerading as walrus. As Wilson says: "The discomfort may have been extreme".

Lucy R Fisher
★★★★★

Curious Devices and Mighty Machines

Exploring Science Museums

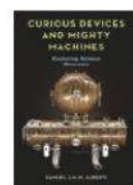
Samuel JMM Alberti

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 256pp, £20, ISBN 9781789146394

A curious book, supposedly a survey of the current state of science museums by the Director of Collections of the National Museums of Scotland, much of it could have been written 30 years ago when I was training to be a curator. It is very much rooted in the historical object end of science museums and Alberti's text comes to life when he is talking about these. But he is lukewarm about innovations such as the public engagement with science agenda, anything digital, evaluation, and particularly interactives, about which he uses the dismissive and pejorative term "whizz-bangs".

He is, though, excellent on the sometimes eccentric origin of science museums and their creators, and on the Indiana Jones-like joys of museum stores, highlighting the museum community's dirty secret – while curators love collecting things, they hate doing the paperwork, so the stores are rife with undocumented material at risk of losing their stories. As for the future, he gives cursory



coverage of improving diversity but totally misses the vital decolonisation agenda that is rich territory for telling new stories through museums, doesn't really engage with the potential of new technologies, and basically sees it as more of the same, but with the latest objects. Ultimately this is more a rearguard action by a breed of curator receding into history than a true examination of the impact and potential of the contemporary science museum.

Ian Simmons
★★★★★

The washing of brains

For something that doesn't exist and has never been made to work, brainwashing is still widely believed in, says **David V Barrett**

Brainwashed

A New History of Thought Control

Daniel Pick

Profile Books/Wellcome Collection 2022
Hb, 341pp, £20, ISBN 9781781257890

Brainwashing

Reality or Myth?

Massimo Introvigne

Cambridge University Press 2022
Pb, 75pp, £15, ISBN 9781009014632

There are two main problems with Daniel Pick's book. The first is that it's wordy: whole pages throughout could easily be cut to a single sentence.

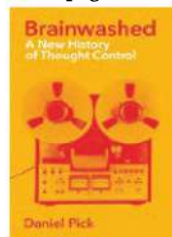
From the beginning he rightly casts doubt on the existence of brainwashing – yet he fails to mention Eileen Barker's groundbreaking *The Making of a Moonie* which demonstrated some 40 years ago that the common idea of people being brainwashed into joining a cult simply doesn't happen, and that the very concept of brainwashing is a fiction.

The chapter on the US prisoners-of-war after the Korean War, which sparked journalist Edward Hunter to coin the term brainwashing – using language, Pick says, that is “obviously biased, polarised and sensationalistic” – points out correctly that nearly all of the 21 POWs eventually returned to the US. The CIA wanted to replicate what they assumed had happened to the soldiers in Korea; a psychoanalyst himself, Pick doesn't hesitate to reveal the horrific treatment given to patients of psychiatrists and neuroscientists in the name of research.

A chapter on totalitarian states says that whether the subjugated masses truly believe the state-fed propaganda, or whether they just pretend to because it's safer, it still brings conformity. There are brief mentions of the role that women have traditionally been expected to take in society, and there's a page or so on Milgram's somewhat morally dubious experiments. A chapter

on conspiracy theorists, and the populist appeal of politicians like Berlusconi, Bolsonaro, Trump and Johnson, adds little to the discussion.

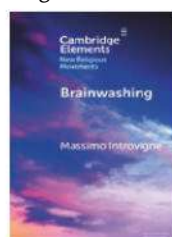
The second main problem with Pick's book is the title. Very little of his book is actually about brainwashing (whatever that might be thought to be). At one point in a long chapter about the advertising industry (including three pages on a TV campaign to



get Americans to eat more prunes!) he comments on Marshall McLuhan's books: “It was good, he realised – if books were

to sell – to have quirky titles to catch attention.” Pick's book should be titled *Socialised* or *Persuaded* or *Influenced*: far more accurate, but not as attention-catching as *Brainwashed*.

One thing almost entirely missing from Pick's book is any discussion of brainwashing in new religious movements – “sects and cults” – a major area of concern over the last few decades. Huge amounts of scholarly work



have been done on this by sociologists of religion, but he doesn't mention any of it. Amongst many others, Massimo Introvigne, director of CESNUR, the Italian Centre for Studies on New Religions, has spent years arguing that brainwashing is, to use his term in this slim book, a pseudo-scientific concept.

He runs through the history of the brainwashing concept; the term was coined by journalist and CIA agent Edward Hunter in 1950, ostensibly after he met a Chinese man who used the term “wash brain”, but Introvigne thinks the source was actually from George Orwell's reference to a “brain ... washed clean”

in 1984, a book that deeply influenced Hunter. Hunter's insistence on brainwashing was ideological; it was the only possible explanation, he said, for people believing Marxist theories that are “so ridiculous and so patently false that an American would be inclined to laugh them off”.

Much of what we all “know” about brainwashing comes from films like *The Manchurian Candidate* – i.e. the popular conception of brainwashing is based almost entirely on fiction.

Whether it's called brainwashing or thought reform or coercive persuasion, the conclusive evidence is that it simply doesn't work. The CIA spent years experimenting with it, using a mixture of hallucinogenic drugs, hypnosis, sensory deprivation, electroshock treatment, lobotomy and other techniques on subjects who were prison inmates, psychiatric patients of the researchers or “destitute volunteers who had been promised significant cash remuneration”; they found that they could destroy someone, but not rebuild them with new beliefs.

And yet some still insist that the difference between religious “cults” and mainstream religions is that cults use brainwashing to recruit and keep their members. As with Hunter's view of Marxist beliefs, Introvigne says, it's an ideological approach, and a circular argument: cults use brainwashing to get people to believe their weird teachings, so any religion with unusual beliefs must use brainwashing and therefore be a cult. He concludes that “too often brainwashing theories functioned as no more than an attempt to use a pseudoscientific language to mask value judgments about unpopular beliefs” – a fair summary of the subject. There is more solid detail packed into Introvigne's 75 pages than in Pick's 341 pages, but it's never rushed or skimmed over.

Pick ★★

Introvigne ★★★★★

Am I Normal?

The 200-Year Search for Normal People (and Why They Don't Exist)

Sarah Chaney

Profile Books/Wellcome Collection 2022

Hb, 336pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781788162456

This fascinating work investigates the issues surrounding the question “Am I Normal?” – a matter considered by many of us during our lives and preoccupying the minds of younger people at present (magnified through the lens of social media). Chapters examine normality within the context of bodies, minds, sex, feelings, kids and society.

Chaney begins by explaining that generally the term “normal” was not used to describe anything other than mathematical models until the 20th century. Then the concept became framed within the context of health. The BMI chart, that we have all come across, was created by US Insurance Companies and based primarily on designing insurance policies for better-off, white Americans. It also relied on an equation on weight designed in 1832! A competition was organised to find a “normal” American wom-



an, based on their calculations. No one was found to fit this model, which speaks volumes...

For us fortians, Chaney examines those people born with deformities who were then classified as “freaks”, people who experienced stigmata and women dismissed as having hysteria. She explores those who have experienced hallucinations and had visions – and references an 1889 Society of Psychical Research census of hallucinations which concluded that seeing visions and hearing voices was not “abnormal” and was more common than previously thought. It is clear that real danger can occur when someone does not fit into a “prescribed mode of normality” and this is then backed up by “science” (eg the BMI chart). Anyone who might not fit into “perceived norms” will have experience of some of the arguments discussed here; it is good to have the ammunition to counteract those who challenge your own existence for some constructed idea of “normality”.

Sue Hardiman

★★★★★

THE HAUNTED GENERATION

BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY

"Please treat the church and houses with care," reads an anonymous but heartfelt note, pinned to the wooden door of a Dorset church since December 1943. "We have given up our homes where many of us lived for generations to help win the war to keep men free. We shall return one day and thank you for treating the village kindly..."

The story of Tyneham (FT216:40-43, 333:76-77), is one of great sacrifice and – ultimately – unbearable yearning. With plans afoot for the 1944 Normandy landings, this sleepy village was requisitioned by the Ministry of Defence for military exercises, its 225 residents permanently rehomed. And, despite the bittersweet optimism of one concerned note-writer, they were never to return. Eighty years later, the village remains uninhabited and partially reclaimed by nature, a spectral echo of a long-lost community. In 2012, it provided the inspiration for a gently affecting album, *Tyneham House*. The record is a plaintive collection of softly-plucked guitar, wistful Mellotron and rustling field recordings, a melodic amble around Tyneham's half-demolished cottages and deserted schoolrooms. It has now been freshly reissued on vinyl, but the two musicians involved have always remained resolutely anonymous. "It just seemed unimportant really, who we were," one of them discreetly tells me. "That being said, I can't pretend I don't love a good mystery, and I think we both loved the idea that years after we made it someone might find an old battered copy in the back of a charity shop and wonder what it was all about...". *Tyneham House* is re-released on 23 May, and is available from claypipemusic.co.uk.

Josephine Foster (above), it seems, is similarly haunted by the occasionally chilling winds of the early 20th century. Her new album *Domestic Sphere* offers an intriguing US take on hauntology, sounding for all the world like a fractured slab of shellac from Depression-era America. Here, she has surrounded her



unearthly warble of a voice with scraps of spectral guitar and the piercing wail of Tennessee desert cats, and on one touching track – the appropriately-titled 'Reminiscence' – she is accompanied by the crackly vocals of her own late great-grandmother, Filomena Maltese. Head to josephinefostermusic.bandcamp.com. Equally in thrall to the distinctly globular is Penelope Trappes (below), whose new album *Heavenly Spheres* is a darkly dreamlike collection for voice, upright piano and hissing German reel-to-reel tape recorder. Lovers of MR James will thrill to discover it was recorded, in blissful isolation, in



the Suffolk town of Aldeburgh, the setting for *A Warning To The Curious*. Although apparently Penelope took more inspiration from her two-week residency in the former home of Imogen Holst than from a midnight quest to unearth the lost crown of Anglia. Still, it's a beautiful album and it's available from penelopetrappes.bandcamp.com.

It's clearly quite the month for lovers of antiquated tape hiss. Similarly experimenting with the comforting wheeze of analogue technology is Cate Brooks, whose new album *Tapeworks* is a love letter to a 1960s tape recorder salvaged from a Lowestoft junk shop in the late 1990s. Complete, apparently, with a demonstration tape used by the previous owner to record a TV performance by Billy Fury and the accompanying chirrups of a budgie now (presumably) long since expired and gone to join the Choir Invisible. Cate's record

is an immersive haze of slow, ambient synth textures and half-heard vocals (courtesy of Goldfrapp collaborator Hazel Mills), all looped on the clunking reels of this vintage gizmo. And the hissing of ancient tapes

accumulates as the album progresses, become an evocative instrument in its own right. It's available from cafeakaput.bandcamp.com.

Elsewhere, anyone in the mood for beasties? This column wouldn't be the same without beasties. Mombi Yuleman's new album *The Curse Of Spring-Heeled Jack* is a delightfully cinematic homage to the notoriously boingy demon reported to be leaping effortlessly between British rooftops in the late 19th century (FT310:30-35), and a quick hop over to mombiyuleman.bandcamp.com should secure a copy. I can also recommend *Dreaming Eden*, a new album by Lisbon-based scenester João Branco Kyrón. The main mover in Portuguese acid-folk band Beautify Junkyards, João has used Christopher Priest's 1977 novel *A Dream Of Wessex* – about a collective of disillusioned idealists who retreat into a virtual utopia – as the inspiration for an album of pulsating beats and psychedelic textures. Dream yourself over to ghostbox.co.uk/belbury-music.

Meanwhile, those keen to retreat into a very real utopia of 1970s film soundtracks should drive a battered Ford Granada to buriedtreasure.bandcamp.com. Here, unalloyed joy can be found in a new compilation titled *Programme Music: More Themes From The Josef Weinberger Archive 1965-80*. A riot of wah-wah guitars, funky beats and sensuously throbbing organs, it's a selection of library music composed and recorded by the finest mutton-chopped session veterans of the era. Tracks like 'Stoned', 'Brown Velvet' and 'The Witching Hour' will transport those of a certain mindset to an era when nylon shirts from C&A came complete with Campari stains and ever-evolving underarm sweat patches. All this and the theme from *Screen Test*, too.

Visit the Haunted Generation website at www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk, send details of new releases, or memories of the original "haunted" era to hauntedgeneration@gmail.com, or find me on Twitter... @bob_fischer



Weird high-water marks for kids

This latest bumper set from the BFI reminds us that Saturday morning visits to the local cinema became noticeably weirder as the Children's Film Foundation collided with the 1970s



Children's Film Foundation Bumper Box Volume 4

Dir various, UK 1953-1984
BFI, £26.99 (Blu-ray)

"The Children's Film Foundation films are like those weird Public Information Films from the Central Office of Information," says BFI archivist and producer Vic Pratt. "You carry them with you. They provide high-water marks of your childhood that you really treasure later in life. A frisson of excitement that it's hard to match when you're an adult."

Between 1951 and 1988, the CFF produced over 400 films for children, an eclectic body of work that became woven into the fabric of late 20th century childhood. For many of us, the increasing, all-pervasive weirdness of these films provided a crucial gateway into grown-up horror and even, perhaps, a wider interest in all matters fortan. Vic Pratt himself – who has spent the last decade curating the BFI's DVD releases from this giddy archive – cites 1971's *Mr Horatio Knibbles* as a watershed moment. As an impressionable young boy, he was so traumatised by this tale of friendship between a young girl and a six-foot talking rabbit that he had to be physically removed

from a screening at the Camber Sands Pontins. "They had to call my dad," he recalls. "And he apologetically took me back to our chalet".

The fourth *Children's Film Foundation Bumper Box* acts as a perfect microcosm of the CFF's slide into all-out weirdness. And although the earliest features on this nine-film set are more rooted in the everyday, they still provide glimpses of a fascinatingly grimy past. *The Dog and the Diamonds* (1953) sees a jewel robbery foiled by filthy-faced London kids, all freshly rehomed from bombed-out Victorian slums to concrete council flats. *Blow Your Own Trumpet* (1958) is a foray into kitchen sink drama, with a teenage Michael Crawford desperate to join his local colliery band. In *The Missing Note* (1961) we're afforded further tantalising glimpses of post-war London, with well-heeled kids chasing a wayward piano around the streets of Twickenham. Only 1955's *The Stolen Airliner* hints at more ambitious adventures: written and directed by future Hammer stalwart Don Sharp, it is tinged with the earliest rumblings of Cold War-era paranoia.

Exploding into colour, *The Big Catch* (1968) is a beautifully-shot depiction of class conflict in a Scottish fishing village.

But it's the wonderful *Blinker's Spy-Spotter* (1972) that proves the real turning point of this collection. A delicious gear-change into what Vic calls the "total post-psychedelic splurge" of the CFF's imperial phase, it stars David Spooner as the titular Blinker, a boy inventor in jam-jar glasses whose bedroom is a riot of home-made, automated gadgets. His mission? To prevent the revolutionary "Crystal X" invented by his deerstalker-wearing father from falling into the hands of dastardly criminal mastermind Bernard Bresslaw. Fans of Jon Pertwee-era *Doctor Who* will delight at the presence of a scientific research complex with conveniently lax security and a sprightly yellow(ish) roadster being driven at breakneck speeds along treacherous country lanes.

From here, the brakes are off. *The Flying Sorcerer* (1974) is the knockabout comedy, with *The Vicar of Dibley*'s John Bluthal discreetly inventing time travel and subsequently transporting his flares-wearing nephew David (Kim Burfield) to mediæval England. Here, hapless wizard Astrolabe (Tim Barrett) is being menaced by perhaps the slowest-moving dragon in Christendom, and – with an unmistakeable whiff of *Catweazle* in the air – all three of them are catapulted back to the 1970s. It's great fun. More considered is 1978's *Mr Selkie*. Tapping into stories from Celtic folklore (*Rentaghost*'s Molly Weir adds Scottish gravitas), it stars Peter Bayliss as a disgruntled sealion adopting human form to campaign against mankind's pollution of the oceans. It's a thoughtful and prescient fable, and an interesting insight into the earliest days of eco-awareness. As Vic Pratt points out, "the CFF were way ahead of the curve".

The long-lost gem, though? *Gabrielle and the Doodleman*, from 1984. Never granted a cinema release, it centres on

the miserable existence of the wheelchair-bound Gabrielle (Prudence Oliver), a young girl whose mother has been killed in a car crash caused by her now terminally depressed father (Gareth Hunt). Her only respite from this bleakness is the *Space Invaders*-style game she plays endlessly on a BBC Micro computer in her darkened bedroom. But her plight is noted by the denizens of an Elysian realm of mythical beings, themselves concerned that the relentless march of home computing is eroding their potency in the imaginations of 1980s children. It's a concern stridently voiced by gangly "Agent Seven Double O" (Matthew Kelly). "Who in their right mind is going to send for the fairy godmother nowadays?" he ponders. "Or Merlin the Magician? Children down there have got better tricks of their own..."

Nevertheless, he is despatched by Machiavellian overlord Windsor Davies to provide respite for Gabrielle. Travelling to our world through the circuits of her computer (cue glorious scenes of Kelly and film-stealing genie Eric Sykes protecting each other from *Space Invaders* lasers), he is rechristened "The Doodleman" by Gabrielle. And, true to his mission, he grants her a series of heartbreakingly modest wishes. These are realised through ambitious dream sequences – a mediæval pageant, a circus, pantomime – in which, tellingly, Gabrielle is able-bodied and her father is now confined to a wheelchair. It's a jarring combination of tones, but the cast are a joy, and its inclusion is the highlight of a collection that becomes slowly subsumed by a sense of deliciously vintage strangeness.

Bob Fischer





TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



Jonathon Ross has been such a fixture of British broadcasting for the last 30-odd years, appearing on TV and radio in such diverse projects as *Film 2000* to *The Masked Singer*, it's easy to forget that he's long been into fortean interest stuff, even fronting his own, now largely-forgotten series *The Incredibly Strange Film Club* and *Fantastic Facts*, an ITV mid-evening offering from 1992 in which Ross, assisted by Wilf Lunn, "looked at strange but true stories from around the world, including sheep who faint" (it prompted correspondence in *FT* if memory serves, when he chatted with a chap who claimed to speak alien languages, echoing Patrick

Moore's similar interview with a man who "spoke Venusian" 20 years earlier).

Anyway, he's returned to the general theme with his new series *Jonathon Ross' Myths And Legends* (C4) in which he "twavels the length and bweadth of Bwitamin" going up mountains and down caves and joining in with things in order to investigate our "wich hewitage" (I'll stop now.) In episode one he's crossing northern England.

He often gets asked, entirely in earnest, where Dracula's grave can be found

Wearing a natty pink blazer, presumably in a nod to Michael Portillo, Ross boards a vintage steam railway carriage – first stop Whitby, where he delves into *Dracula*. The more discerning among you may question why an entirely fictional work qualifies as a myth, but Ross makes a reasonable point here, considering Whitby has itself become so imbued with the Count that it can be argued we're witnessing mythology in the making. The process is clearly well underway as Ross visits the Abbey and meets Mark Williamson, property manager by day and vampire obsessive by night (and by day as well, as it happens), who tells him that he often gets asked, entirely in earnest, where *Dracula's* grave can be found.

Next, along the coast to the Hob Holes of Runswick Bay: Hobs are hairy, dwarf-like beings with magical powers

to cure ailments, find lost things, set clocks on ovens etc, and people would walk up and down the shoreline reciting ditties and leaving offerings to ask for their help. Ross meets with a local storyteller before he heads inland to Knaresborough for a natter about Mother Shipton. Standing at the mouth of the eponymous cave, Ross and local guide Joanne Hope (in period costume, with period props and period electronic ticket machine bolted to the wall) chat about wise women and herbalism, but frustratingly, old Ursula's prophecies are mentioned only in passing. Off to the moors for a bit about Will O' The Wisps, and a visit to Haworth, where the Brontës' maid, Tabitha Ackroyd, introduced the children to magical lore. It's all a bit 'fortean tourist board', but none the worse for that and passes an hour interestingly enough.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

Have you heard the cringey new term 'elevated horror'? It's used for films like *The Witch*, *Get Out* and *Hereditary* by people who think horror has only just achieved 'art' status. It's bunk, of course; so it's nice to see Second Sight release three films that firmly remind us that 'horror' and 'masterpiece' are not recent bedfellows.

By 1977, audiences had thoroughly tasted the blood of *Dracula* through Hammer, *Dark Shadows*, *The Night Stalker*, and *Blacula*. There seemed little more to say about vampires (*Dracula's Dog* was going into production the same year). Then George Romero brought us a vampire who uses syringes to extract blood and hisses into the camera with plastic novelty fangs. Romero's reputation as

an intelligent and provocative filmmaker is often linked to his superb *Dead* trilogy. Here was a man who used horror to 'say stuff'. Yet *Martin* is his most profound film, showcasing his brilliant writing and caring nature. It's one of the most impartial, compelling and thought-provoking movies I've ever seen.

Next is *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which the *Observer* called "the first true masterpiece of Australian cinema"; being a huge fan of 1971's *Wake In Fright*, I'd beg to differ, but a masterpiece it certainly is. In 1900, a group of girls head out on a school trip... and inexplicably vanish into an eerie rock formation. It's not a horror film *per se*, but it's often described as one. It's easy to

'Horror' and 'masterpiece' are not recent bedfellows

see why. Director Peter Weir weaves such a chilling and odd atmosphere that to watch it is to drift lazily into a daydream-cum-nightmare. It's so well done that even Mrs Mangle from *Neighbours* turning up doesn't break the spell.

People will call *Picnic* and *Martin* 'elevated' because they refuse to explain themselves. Yet only psychopaths will think *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is open to 'interpretation'. It's a ferociously straightforward story of 1970s hippies falling prey to a demented family of inbred cannibals. True, Tobe Hooper plays on American prejudice against the Southern states, youth prejudice against tradition and so on; I'm not saying there's no subtext. But *Chainsaw's* power comes

from Hooper's distinctly unambiguous style. This is like a documentary or reality TV. *Martin* tells us 'sex killers may or may not be sympathetic', *Picnic* says 'the world may, or may not, be supernatural', *Chainsaw* says, 'sometimes dysfunctional families breed maniacs, and they will stick you on hooks, make you suck their fingers and eat you.' All three messages are worth pondering.

This trio looks beautiful in new 4K UHD prints, stacked with expansive extras and commentaries. Fans of the term 'elevated horror' might say such bulging bonuses prove that some horror films are intelligent enough to inspire debate and reflection. But I have a book on my shelf about the 1976 film *Blood Sucking Freaks*, in which a magician and a dwarf throw darts at a woman's bare buttocks, painted with a target. Films are as elevated as we choose them to be. Including *Draculas' Dog*, by the way.

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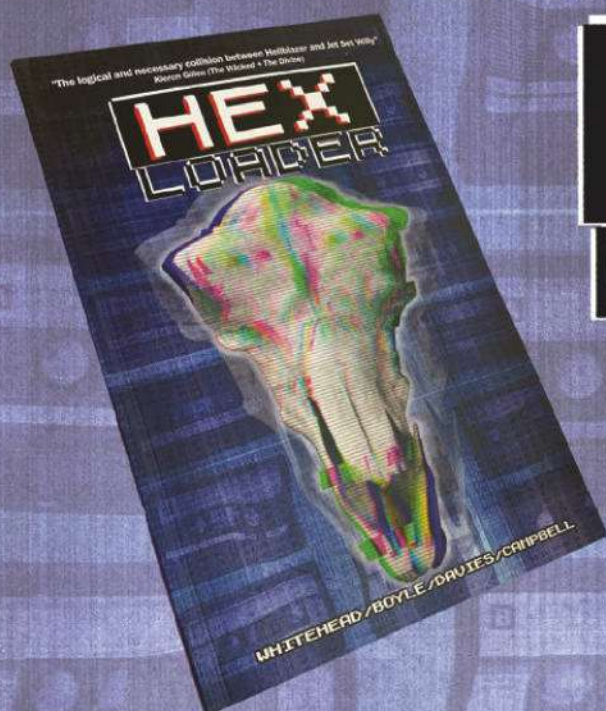
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Major Jesse Marcel

With reference to his article on Nazi UFOs [FT430:44-49], I would be curious to know what evidence SD Tucker has for suggesting that Major Jesse Marcel was a liar. Researchers, who I suspect have spent a lot more time than Mr Tucker in researching the Roswell incident, have come to the conclusion that he was a decent and honourable man. Mr Tucker himself admits that Marcel's account of what happened in New Mexico in 1947 was fairly muted compared to later claims. Marcel was the chief intelligence officer at the then only nuclear armed air base in the world. It may suit Mr Tucker's agenda to portray such a man as untruthful or a fantasist but, given his status and range of responsibilities, it is hardly likely. Furthermore, Marcel's son (a medical doctor and high-ranking soldier) and many others have corroborated his specific claims.

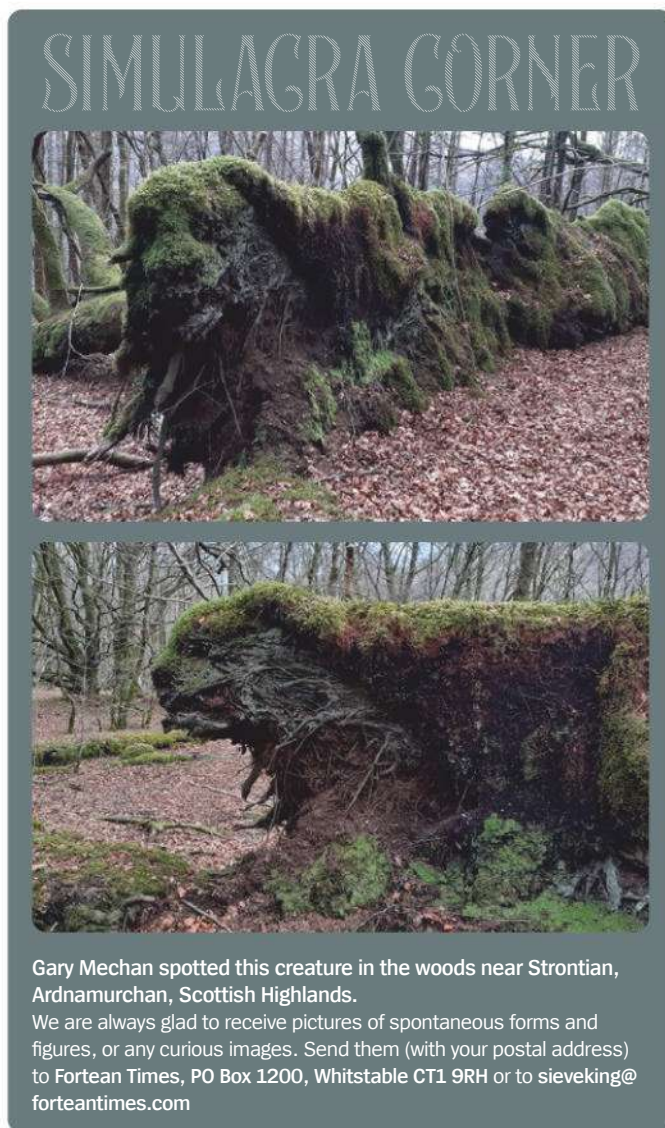
Geoff Clifton

Solihull, West Midlands

SD Tucker replies:

I'm afraid Mr Clifton has slightly misunderstood. Whilst I don't think an alien spacecraft actually crashed at Roswell, when I say Major Marcel "spun a highly sellable yarn", I mean rather that the authors of later, 1980s and 1990s-era, books on this subject were able to spin out his initial testimony about tinfoil-like materials being found on the Roswell Ranch in 1947 into a much more elaborate tale about ET corpses and structured craft being found, etc.

I fully accept that Marcel retrieved some odd debris out in the field one day, but in my view he exaggerated or misinterpreted what he found. For example, he claimed the tinfoil-like material he found at the crash-site was essentially indestructible to fire, knife, etc, yet photographs of him examining this material, like the one reproduced [FT430:46], clearly show it has been torn into little bits, which doesn't really sound all that indestructible, does it? I don't know, but I would imagine the tinfoil-like substances a military weather-balloon of that era was



Gary Mechan spotted this creature in the woods near Strontian, Ardnamurchan, Scottish Highlands.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteantimes.com

partly constructed from would not be the same tinfoil ordinary people use in kitchens; maybe it was indeed tougher and more resistant to flame and blade than Marcel might have expected, leading him to inaccurately and gullibly, but honestly, conclude it was of ET origin, whether at the time or later?

Or maybe the misunderstanding was deliberate after all. There is in fact some specific evidence Marcel was a liar as regards certain aspects of his life, namely his military career and academic record. In 1995, investigator Robert Todd examined his official service files, discovering a litany of exaggerations and untruths designed to make him seem

more of an all-action hero than he really was (unnecessary, given that he truly did risk his life on various WWII aerial missions, but if readers wish to see the details, go to <http://www.roswellfiles.com/pdf/KowPflp120895.pdf>). Lying about your war-record doesn't necessarily mean you have also lied about a UFO-crash, but it hardly adds to Marcel's credibility. In my book, I describe Marcel as "fantasy-prone", an ambiguous term which reflects the fact I have no idea whether he was telling deliberate falsehoods in the generally accepted sense of the term or merely lying to himself, Walter Mitty-style. I have no "agenda", as implied, my book is about the legend of Nazi UFOs; Roswell barely features.

Terrapins

Re terrapins in Leicester [FT430:64]: terrapins are common in the UK. Several species of terrapin have been in British rivers for many years. The most common is the red-eared terrapin, which although originally native to Britain around 8,000 years ago, has now returned. Climate change helps them thrive. Unfortunately, at least 4,000 are thought to be feral (ex-pets dumped in rivers) and rescuers are struggling to keep up with numbers.

Here in Northumberland I've been seeing them for over 15 years. At certain times of year you can pass along the river Wansbeck and see a number of them sleeping on the embankment. In 2012 a rarer yellow terrapin was caught in the river.

Saskia Smith

Northumberland

I have seen terrapins on Tooting Bec Common in London. I was told they are from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle craze of the early 1990s when people bought them as pets, only to find that they outgrew their tanks or simply were no longer wanted and were dumped in rivers and ponds across the UK. They have thrived since and are a big problem as they can eat all the resident species. Some have been found to have grown as large as dinner plates and can give a nasty bite.

Phil Brand

London

Three-legged pig

I enjoyed reading about the three-legged pig [FT424:69]. I lived in Dumpton road for a while and often wondered about the history of the Brown Jug. It's good to know that this lovely old building is protected along with its ghost. There's a post office where the pram or cart is now, but this small corner still has a rural feel so close to a busy main road between Broadstairs and Ramsgate.

(Miss) Hilary Cox

East Grinstead, Sussex

Banana's flight path

Now it turns out that on 10 February 1989, the legendary flight of Space Liberace's banana-shaped UFO was actually sighted over *more* towns in Alabama than just its most famous appearance in Fyffe [FT55:33, 408:32-39, 411:73, 427:60]. Recently, more vintage newspaper clippings have resurfaced from Fort Payne, Alabama – the town next to where Space Liberace appeared in a UFO over Fyffe. The newspaper accounts report *other* locations in Alabama where the UFO was sighted. I took the sightings and plotted them on a map of Dekalb County, Alabama, where all the UFOs were seen.

When I connected the dots, an ellipsoid trajectory became clear, with major towns dotted along the edges of the oval with other sightings within the ovoid itself. With this information gathered from the Fort Payne *Times Journal*, an actual flight plan of the flying banana can be mapped out from pinpointing all the reported sightings.

To piece it all together, the voyage apparently started near the town of Licksillet. The UFO then moved north to Fort Payne and eventually turned northwest toward Fyffe. Next, the UFO went in a south-westerly direction through Grove Oak, Ten Broeck, Dawson, and Geraldine, then turned southeast to Crossville and finally on to Collinsville. The overall trajectory of the UFO is difficult to determine, as for over a week it appeared in various locations within Dekalb County – and at times it was seen to abruptly reverse direction. From the diagram plotted on the map, the route the UFO takes fully circumnavigates the centre of Dekalb County, creating an almost perfect elliptical flightpath.

In the newspaper reports, there is one reference to the banana-shaped UFO; however, there is no mention of Space Liberace per se. Could it be that the UFO paused just long enough only over one town,



TIMES JOURNAL, Fort Payne, AL – Feb. 18-19, 1989

Alabama UFO baffles police

GEORGIANA (AP) — Authorities remained baffled by an unknown flying object flashing multi-colored lights that police said remained stationary in the sky for more than an hour.

Sgt. Denson Scott, along with two other police officers, went to check out a citizen's report of the object Wednesday night.

"You could see it from anywhere in the city. It was fairly high in the sky," he said Thursday.

Scott said officers observed the object for about an hour, until it moved away to the northwest. He said the report was referred to the state Department of Public Safety.

Public Safety dispatcher Lee Pease says officials at Ft. Rucker, Ft. Benning, Ft. Maxwell and the Federal Aviation Administration couldn't identify the object.

The call was the second report of an unidentified flying object in the state in a week. About 20 Dekalb County residents, including Fyffe police officers and a state trooper, saw an object with flashing red, green and white lights in various locations the night of Feb. 10.

TIMES JOURNAL, Fort Payne, AL – Feb. 14, 1989

Friday night UFO remains a mystery

By ELTON ROBERTS

The Times Journal

From Grove Oak to Licksillet, numerous sightings of a mysterious aircraft described as "a silent thing streaking through the dark" Friday night prompted a deluge of calls to the Dekalb County Sheriff's Office.

Observed by numerous law enforcement officers and private citizens across south Dekalb County, the aircraft mystified and terrified residents.

The first report came at 8:42 p.m. when a Grove Oak woman informed the Fyffe Police Department that she had watched the object for over an hour with a pair of binoculars.

The woman, who later asked not to be identified, said the hovering aircraft appeared to be the shape of a banana with the curved side up. "There was a red light on each end and a white

light in a line between them. The top of the curve was outlined in green light."

She said that when the craft turned, the green lights splayed outward "like fireworks" in a circular shape.

Police chief Junior Garmany and assistant chief Fred Worke were dispatched to check the phenomenon. According to Garmany, when the officers arrived the aircraft was still hovering. "It was completely silent," he said. "We got out of the car and we turned off the engine and the radio. When we started towards it, it began moving away."

The police chief said the officers followed the object from Fyffe back to Dawson, a distance of about 12 miles. Then the hovering aircraft suddenly reversed direction and silently flew over the heads of the startled officers.

"We figured it was going about

three or four hundred miles an hour," Garmany said. The officers estimated the aircraft's altitude at 1,000 to 1,500 feet, but they were able to get a good look at it.

"It looked like an airplane at first, and it was moving fast," Worke said. "But it didn't make a sound."

"It was bigger than a jumbo jet," Garmany said. According to the officers the shape was difficult to describe, but appeared roundish, with flashing green, white, and red lights along the sides. White lights dotted the bottom, "like landing lights."

Worke said the white lights underneath appeared to be shining upward, illuminating the bottom of the aircraft.

After the aircraft left, it was spotted by a state trooper and by police officers in Crossville, Geraldine, and Collinsville. On one occasion, police officers reportedly saw three of the

aircraft at one time.

The Dekalb County Sheriff's Office received over 50 telephone calls about the sightings. One call came from a terrified Licksillet resident. "He was about to have a heart attack and his wife was screaming," an official said. "He said it came over at treetop level and that he had shot at it with a 12-gauge shotgun."

Airport officials in Birmingham, Huntsville, and at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery were unable to explain the sightings. A Weather Service official said the description "doesn't match any kind of weather balloon we have."

The woman who first sighted the craft said she hoped officials would be able to logically explain the phenomenon. "I'd love to know what it is," she said. "I'm not crazy and I don't go around chasing UFOs."

Too stupid?

In Avi Loeb's discussion of the interstellar object 'Oumuamua ('Extraterrestrial: the first sign of intelligent life beyond the Earth'), I came across this sentence: "I often wonder whether another civilization, one that had the benefit of pursuing science for a billion years, would even consider us intelligent." An alien spacecraft might well regard our Sun as merely an opportunity to slingshot itself on to a more promising star, oblivious to the Earth and its inhabitants – re. Arthur C Clarke's *Rendezvous With Rama*. Science fiction is always up for putting us back in our box, but a deep gulf of intelligence between us and the aliens might well explain why ufonauts haven't landed in Red Square or on the White House lawn.

In another of Clarke's stories, the Overlords of *Childhood's End* turn up at the precise moment when the old guard – us – is about to be replaced by its own offspring – a new alien race, our own offspring, so advanced that they're totally unaware of the rest of mankind. Sometimes – maybe every time – there's no point in two races even trying to communicate; they have nothing to say the other could understand. In our own century, we are just about ready to usher in our own descendants, a brand new non-biological entity called AI with whom we'll co-exist for a couple of decades before it leaves us so far behind with its programming power that only an advanced alien race will be able to communicate with it.

"You've got to wonder" (as David Childress would say) whether the aliens are just hanging around waiting for our own AI to evolve to the point where an alien race could take it into partnership. After all, travel to the nearer stars at near light speed would be easy if we were as long-lived as a non-biological life-form, or could "switch ourselves off" for a couple of centuries as we travelled between the stars. Solid state electronics containing AI would also allow spacecraft to accelerate and manoeuvre in the incredible ways recorded in most contact stories.



Another boat dweller

Apropos Jan Bondeson's photograph of the Garelochhead hermit Susie McGlone and her shack made from an upturned boat [FT429:69], here is another postcard of a boat dweller (above left), this time from Great Yarmouth. Local museums were unable to tell me anything about the man, but he must have been a well-known local character. His home is called Snowdrop Cottage and his habits are made clear by the stack of empty beer crates to the side. How he got through the door is anyone's guess.

A comment on Snowdrop Cottage by a Michael Moss can be found online: "This cottage



was in fact the prow of a boat which had been cut off and erected, almost like a sentry box, and stood near the Nelson Monument on South Denes. There was an article in the *Yarmouth Mercury* (10/11/72) which featured this cottage but its accompanying photo was very grainy [...] That particular photo [above right] also had my great grandfather's brother standing on the threshold as he, in his later years, used it as a watchman's hut. He and his brothers were all local fishermen/beachmen." (www.francisfrith.com/uk/great-yarmouth/snowdrop-cottage-south-denes_63214514)

Nick Guitard
Bude, North Cornwall

I don't think even Clarke could have imagined what two races of AI might achieve together, but it would be far more than geo-stationary satellites or the Internet. "You've got to wonder" what other more profound and chastening notions we might find lurking in some of Clarke's other stories...

Moir Lamb
By email

Inner Voices

Recent discussions in these pages about 'inner voices' brought to mind my own experience. Between the ages of about five and 10 I would sometimes lie in bed in the dark, unable to move, in a liminal state between waking and sleep. I could hear voices that surrounded me from

above, rather like the audience of a 17th century dissection peering down on me as the subject. The voices spoke fairly quietly but were overlaid so it was difficult to make out what they were talking about. At first I found this scary, as I felt sure the voices were discussing me, perhaps critically? As I grew more used to it, I became aware that what I was hearing was simply short sound-bites randomly sampled from TV, radio and everyday life, including funny clips from cartoons.

Years later, in my late teens, I became interested in Soto Zen Buddhism and was taught to meditate. This type of meditation is not about concentrating on a mantra, but encouraging the mind to become quiet and still. Passing thoughts may be acknowledged, then set free to

float away like leaves on water. I found this extremely difficult, partly because every time I tried to do it I would hear voices that surrounded me from above... It was exactly the same experience that I'd had years earlier!

When I asked my meditation teacher what was going on, he said it was perfectly normal and nothing to worry about – I was simply listening to my subconscious. This seems to me entirely plausible. Our brains chug away all the time, reviewing our recent experiences and filing them away for future reference. Not all of our senses are perceived equally,

and I'm sure the voices in our heads chatter incessantly, but are usually obliterated by the more dominant visual material, music, and so on. The voices may only be perceived when the rest of our brain noise is reduced.

Steve Marshall
By email

Tony Sandy raises some interesting points concerning the phenomenon of hearing voices, as to whether they have a genuine projection from the outside world, or are merely hallucinations [FT428:65]. That paranoia should be thrown into the mix is fascinating, as this brings us into the territory of the modern pharmaceuticals industry, and the distorting effect it imposes upon society in order to stay in business. People who 'hear voices' may be involuntarily recalling the sound of someone's voice as they related some advice relevant to the person's present-day experience. They may be suffering from intrusive PTSD flashbacks, as a result of their brain's flight-or-fight response being overloaded by a traumatic childhood. So, at the end of the day, when a psychiatrist asks "Do you hear voices?" this is an unfair, loaded question.

A person with a spiritual rather than scientific upbringing may, understandably, have difficulty dissociating from the qualia their brain throws up from moment to moment; merely telling them that would not be profitable. The elitist preserve of the medical profession has no tolerance for the whimsical fancies of the average citizen such as spirituality, the arts or cosplay. And so their definitions of insanity reflect this, stuck as they are in stereotypes of the



CLIVE GODDARD

It Happened to Me...

Erroneous announcement

A few years ago in the early 2000s my wife and I were at home with the radio playing in the background. The news was on and it was announced that Stephen King had fallen to his death from a balcony in a theatre in London. I looked at my wife and it was obvious she had heard the same news. We were both asking ourselves: "Did we just hear that correctly?" I went online right away and found that King hadn't died; he was neither in London nor in a theatre at the time, and there was also no other mysterious death along those lines reported elsewhere.

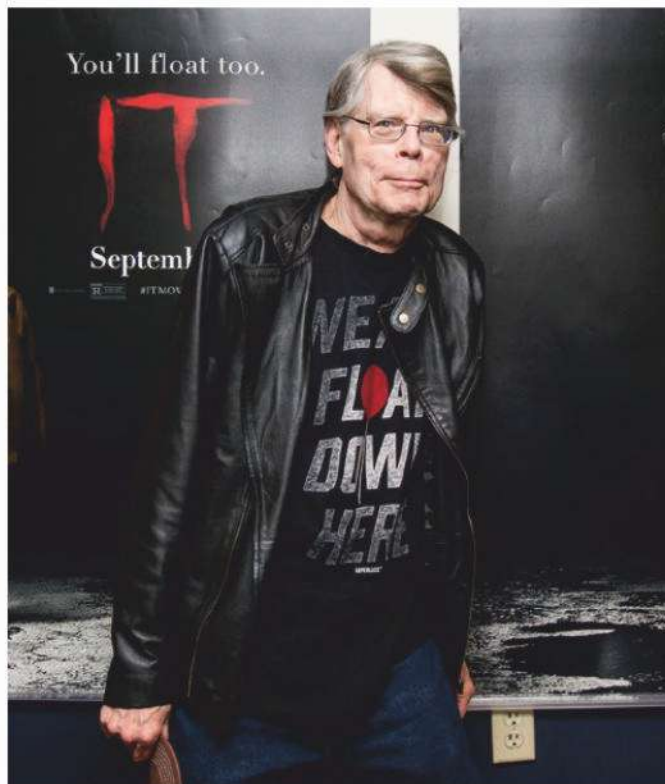
I am a big horror fan, so on occasion may think about the author, but my wife has zero interest in the genre and as such would never think about King in any shape or form – and yet both of us at the same time heard this strange announcement on the radio. We occasionally think about this incident and neither of us has come up with even a hint of an explanation.

Holger Haase
By email

Dancing points

When I was a small girl of six or seven, I could, as I understood it, "see air". By this, I meant that I could see dense little dancing points of light in all empty spaces if I adjusted my way of looking in a very small, unspectacular way. These dancing points were particularly visible in the dark. I took them completely for granted, but on mentioning them to an adult one day and getting a dismissive sort of response, they disappeared and I forgot about them.

They returned a few years ago. Without any kind of strain, I can see these "dancing points" of light everywhere. They are in no way unpleasant or strange. They feel very familiar, and on closer examination have a different character depending on where I see them. In underground stations or modern shopping centres, for example, they are rather



"The radio news announced that Stephen King had fallen to his death from a balcony"

fuzzy and dull. On a recent visit to London, however, staying in a hotel in Bloomsbury, I observed them one night and noticed that they were well defined, varied and compelling.

Sometimes I have wondered if there's something wrong with my eyes, but now in my late 40s, I have perfect vision and have never needed glasses. The appearance of the dancing points is exactly as I remember them being as a child. Is it possible that I can see the ether? Or the souls of the departed? Or can I in fact "see air"?

Lise Cribbin
Munich, Germany

Entrances repeated

I have experienced timeslips twice now, once when I was about 19, waiting in the small

hallway of my then boyfriend's house. He came down the stairs silently, turned left and went into the front room without speaking to me. I was just about to open my mouth and say something when he walked down the stairs and turned left into the front room, as he had done about 10 seconds before. I was gob-smacked; he just laughed when I told him what had 'happened'.

I told a couple of people about it, but hadn't thought about it for years, until a similar thing happened to me a few weeks ago some 30 years later. I was in my kitchen cutting up food for dinner. My kitchen worktop sticks out at an L shape and looks through French doors into my back garden. We use the back entrance to our property and have a straight path leading from the doors to the back gate (maybe 30ft/9m away) out to where we park our car behind our home, accessed by a drive we share with our neighbours.

It was about 6:30pm. My husband popped out for a bottle of wine and a few bits and bobs and I was happily making dinner, with the kitchen TV on for company, facing the doors. I saw car headlights coming down

the drive, pause at the end and reverse into the parking space. Then I briefly caught a glimpse of my husband walking up the path wearing his brown hoodie with orange writing and saw a bottle of wine glinting in his right hand. It was dark but we live on a main road (dual carriageway) and there are lots of streetlights around to cast light. It wasn't pitch black and I could definitely see it was him, his quick stomping gait and what he was wearing. He must have got about halfway up our path and I could see out of the corner of my eye (I was still chopping veg) the security light on our house click on. Then... nothing. He didn't come through the door. Just as I looked up and wondered what he was doing in the garden (maybe selecting wood for our wood burner) I then saw the headlights of the car coming down the driveway etc and the whole thing played out again. Up the path he walked, brown and orange hoodie on, bottle of wine in right hand. The second scenario was probably about 20 seconds behind the first one.

A few points to mention: I don't think I heard the car or heard the gate open and shut in the first scenario, which I usually can; just saw the headlights and briefly saw him, but I did have the TV on and it may have been quite loud. Our neighbour does not use the driveway for his car and parks his vehicle in front of his property. Our house backs onto allotments so there are no other cars behind our house.

I told my husband about it as soon as it happened as I did look pretty shocked when he walked through the door. I saw a child-sized shadow person peep at me round the corner about a week earlier while I was sitting on the loo with the door open in the middle of the night, so maybe I'm putting out a funky forteen vibe at the moment?

Samantha Stringer
Southwick, West Sussex

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In Icelandic folklore, the double appearing before the actual arrival/appearance of someone is called a *Fylgja*, and in Denmark a *Vardogr*. See **FT101:51** (Aug 1997) & **FT104:52** (Nov 1997).

LETTERS

mediaeval motley fool or eccentric mushroom-eating jungle shaman. Psychiatrists do not study genuine cases in training; they use 'simulated patients' or actors pretending they are insane – as if to imply insanity is merely performative. And these prejudices are what have been enshrined in the Diagnostic Codex. As Viktor Frankl would say: "An irrational response to an irrational situation is rational."

James Wright

Southend-on-Sea, Essex

The Xmas truce

Further to Mythconceptions 263 about the WW1 Christmas Truce and the legendary football match supposedly played in No Man's Land [FT426:19, 429:61], the Imperial War Museum certainly agrees that a truce happened. In a section of the IWM website devoted to the truce – or more accurately, truces – there are photos and recordings of interviews with veterans, including a German Artillery officer, a Mr Rickner, indicating that hostilities stopped for a few hours that Christmas Day and British and German troops fraternised and shared cigarettes and drinks. Both British and German contemporary newspapers also ran stories about the truce.

However, the evidence for an actual football match is elusive. As Mat Coward notes, there are no photographs depicting it, and the recollections found in letters and diaries are almost entirely second or third-hand accounts. There is, however, a recorded interview on the IWM website with one veteran, Ernie Williams of the 6th Battalion Cheshire Regiment, who describes how he took part in a mass football 'kickabout' that day, with a 'couple of hundred' men.

Others British veterans interviewed, such as Harold Lewis of the Royal Field Artillery, think the match was a myth to rival the Angel of Mons, although interestingly, Harold didn't arrive at the front line until 1915.

It may never be proved conclusively that a match took place. More interesting for me is the way the idea of it remains embedded in popular culture



Living logo

I was fortunate enough today to be alerted (by the excellent @ScarredForLife2 Twitter account) to the existence of a 1973 TV commercial for Vauxhall Motors featuring an actor posing as a living incarnation of the company's griffin logo. With a top half looking far more like an owl than the traditional eagle, this disturbing creature jumps, leaps and even teleports around a forested park, showing off the latest car models before finally transforming into a variation of the logo (clutching a flower rather than the usual flag). It may be viewed in its startling entirety on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDk1pM78ce0>.

What particularly struck me about this fever-dream of 1970s marketing excess was the remarkable resemblance between the griffin character and the eye-witness drawings of the 'owl man' seen around Mawnan Old Church in Cornwall a mere three years later. I'm personally fairly convinced by the theory that the owl man was an out-of-place European eagle owl; however, I can't help but wonder if any of the witnesses had the Vauxhall griffin rattling around in their subconscious, ready to leap out and enhance any frightening avian experience. I for one am not likely to forget him any time soon!

James Nicholls, *Bayswater, Western Australia*

over 100 years later. The 2014 Sainsbury's Christmas TV advert, for example, used the football match as its storyline, and it was in turn based on Paul McCartney's pop video for his 1983 Christmas single *Pipes of Peace*, in which McCartney played both a British and a German soldier who inadvertently swap Christmas gifts. My favourite comment on it is the exchange between Lieutenant George, Private Baldrick and Captain Blackadder in the final episode of the BBC comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth*, broadcast shortly before Armistice Day in 1989:

"George: I'd just arrived and we had that wonderful Christmas truce.

Baldrick: Do you remember the football match?

Blackadder: Remember it? How could I forget it? I was

never offside, I couldn't believe that decision."

See: www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-real-story-of-the-christmas-truce

Danny Walsh

Ealing, London

Dylan in transition

On 1 March 2023, BBC 4 repeated an episode of the documentary series *Timeshift*, "Bridging the Gap: How the Severn Bridge was Built", during which the subject came up of Bob Dylan and the photograph taken of him waiting for the ferry at Aust.

The ferry tackled the mile-wide crossing between Beachley and Aust and was incredibly unreliable. It only ran during the daytime and its running depended on tides and weather conditions. It was founded in 1829 and ended in September

1966, being made redundant with the opening of the Severn Bridge.

Bob Dylan was photographed by Barry Feinstein waiting for the ferry as he headed to Cardiff in May 1966. The point is made in the programme that this was during the (so-called Judas) tour, when Dylan switched from acoustic to electric, adding extra significance to the image, which not only captures a moment of change in musical history but also a major development in engineering history.

Whilst Dylan is pictured poised at a transitional moment in his artistic development, he is also standing at the death of one era of the river crossing and the birth of a new one, the new bridge nearing its completion in the misty background of the picture.

While these moments of change captured in the photograph were discussed on *Timeshift*, one extra serendipitous element was leaping out at me: the numberplate of Dylan's car waiting to take him from England to Wales, is "540 CYN" and *cyn*, to a Welsh speaker, means before.

The image was chosen as the poster for Martin Scorsese's Dylan documentary *No Direction Home*, and I expect Scorsese chose it as it is a striking image that also shows his subject at a crossing point in his life. I could also point out that Dylan is apparently about to travel on the *Severn Princess* in an Austin Princess DS7. And for the *No Direction Home* poster, DVD and album, the numberplate was doctored to read as '1235 RD' as a reference to the track Rainy day Women # 12 & 35.

Catherine Wallace

By email

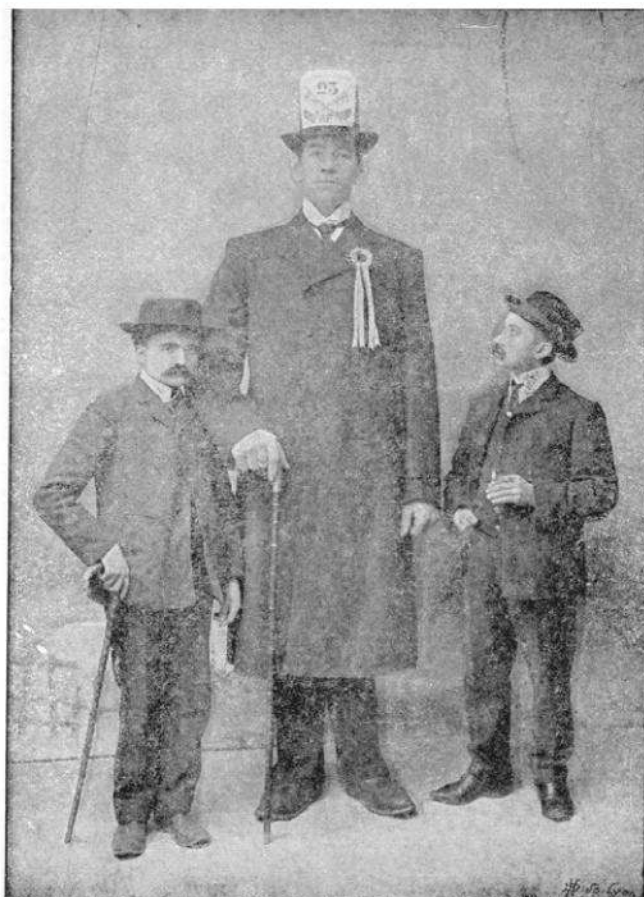


PECULIAR POSTCARDS



JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past recounts the career of a globe-trotting French giant (and his sometime diminutive sidekick)

36. HENRI COT, THE FRENCH GIANT



Géant français Henri COT
Le plus grand Conscrit



ABOVE: An early French postcard of Henri Cot, the largest conscript of the French army. **ABOVE:** A British postcard of "The French Giant".

Henri Joseph Cot was born on 30 January 1883 in the village of La Cros in the Aveyron district of France, the seventh and youngest child in a poor farmer's family. At the age of eight, he began to grow in an alarming manner. At the age of 16, he was more than six feet four inches (193cm) tall, and when he was called up for the army at the age of 20, he was more than seven feet six inches (229cm) tall, and sturdy in proportion. He was called "The

Tallest Army Recruit in France" and there was a good deal of newspaper publicity about him. His parents and siblings were all of normal stature. Henri was a friendly, affable man, who was popular among the villagers of La Cros; he was famous for his great strength, and could pick up a donkey and carry it around the village on his shoulders, just for the fun of it. A postcard was printed to celebrate "le plus grand conscrit de France" as early as 1904.

Attracted by the newspaper publicity, Henri got himself a manager, who made sure he was exhibited for money at fairs and markets. He visited Montpellier, Marseille and Toulouse, among other cities; he even made a tour of Algeria, being exhibited in Alger, Oran and Bougie. In June 1906, the plan was for Henri to tour Britain. When he was exhibited at the Crystal Palace in September that year, he was accompanied by the 25-year-old Finnish dwarf 'Prince Colibri',

who is said to have been able to speak four languages. An awkward-looking character, just 23 inches (58cm) tall and weighing less than eight pounds (3.6kg), he may have suffered from primordial dwarfism; according to a newspaper advertisement when he was exhibiting himself in France in 1904, he was very intelligent, and fond of dogs and children. The contrast between the feeble little dwarf and the sturdy giant could not have been greater.



HENRI COT, the French Giant, and
PRINCE COLIBRI, the Midget.



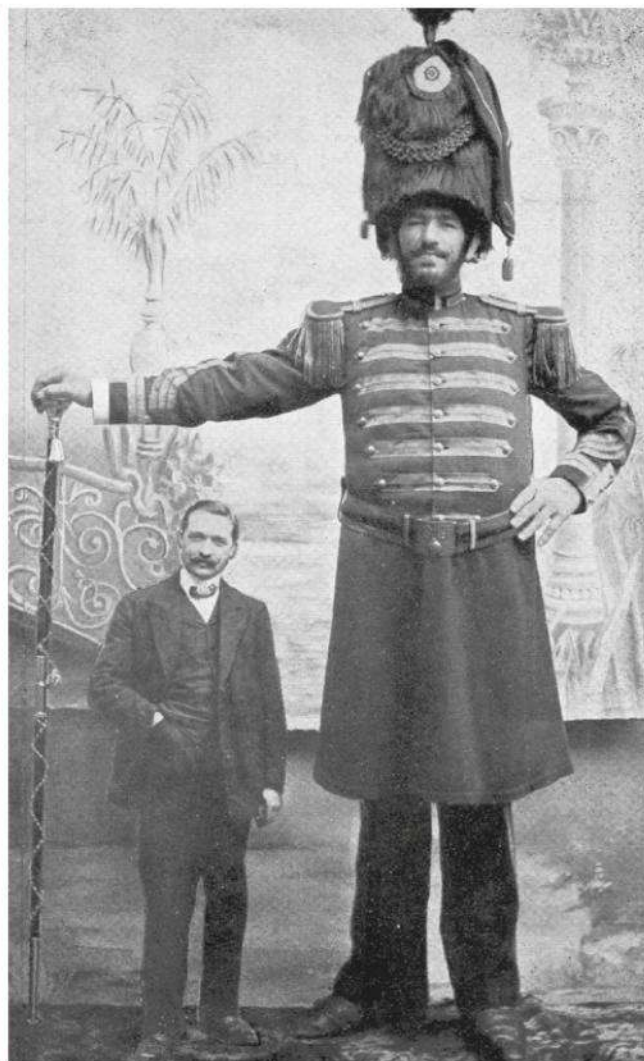
HENRI COT,
The French Giant, who wants to marry the tallest
English Lady.
Age 22 years. Height 8ft. 7½ in. Weight 395 lbs.

ABOVE LEFT: A 1906 postcard showing Henri Cot and Prince Colibri. ABOVE RIGHT: Henri Cot in search of a wife in England. BELOW: Henri Cot in his later guise of 'Joseph Dusorc'.

Henri told several journalists that he was looking for a wife while in Britain: she had to be tall and prepossessing, and should not object to travelling a lot. A wealthy lady in Marseille had proposed marriage to him, he said, and a Mexican millionairess had also shown interest in the giant, but he had turned them both down.

One of the postcards of Henri sold at the exhibition shows him with Prince Colibri; two others make reference to his search for a wife. According to a press cutting, having interviewed 301 ladies willing to marry the wealthy giant, he finally chose the barmaid Miss Emily Faraday, of the Coach and Horses at 108 Notting Hill Gate. They both told the journalist it was a case of love at first sight, and hoped that Prince Colibri, whom the giant used to carry around in his overcoat pocket, would one day find a suitable partner as well.

Cot went on to visit Great Yarmouth, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds, Walsall, Bradford and Manchester. In November 1906, he crossed the Atlantic and spent a short time in Halifax, Nova Scotia, but his visit to Canada was not profitable and he was back in Edinburgh for the Waverly



Market Carnival at Christmas the same year. He went on to visit Newcastle, Southampton and Bath, with less newspaper publicity than before, before returning to his native village with a handsome fortune in *livres sterling*. In January 1908, his manager took Henri to Washington, where he performed with a circus, but his stay in the United States would not be a long one. Our old friend the giant Feodor Machnow (see FT345:74-77), who was even taller than Henri, was currently on his triumphal tour of America, and the French giant could not compare with the Russian colossus in his extravagant costumes. Henri tried a tour of the northern states, but the cold climate did not agree with him, and he returned to Britain, visiting Gravesend, Worthing and Chatham.

Back in France again, Henri settled down in his native village; he made use of his considerable savings to purchase a house, where he lived in idleness with his wife. He exhibited himself for money when he wanted to, but people were getting used to him, and he no longer drew large audiences. In 1910, his new manager suggested that to reclaim his position among Europe's gigantic celebrities, Henri needed to reinvent himself. He should change his name and dress up in an extravagant Napoleonic uniform, like a tambour-major of the Grenadier Guards. Under his new name Joseph Dusorc, Henri toured Germany and Holland with considerable success, and went as far as Austria and Hungary. New postcards were printed to advertise his second career, depicting him in an elaborate pseudo-Napoleonic uniform.

In September 1912, Henri Cot, alias Joseph Dusorc, was on show in Lyon, when he suddenly dropped dead, presumably from an embolism. His scoundrel of a manager stole the giant's body, filled the coffin with stones to disguise his crime, and sold the corpse to a professor of medicine in Montpellier. It is sad but true that the giant's mounted skeleton can still be seen at the anatomical museum of that university.

This is an extract from Jan Bondeson's book *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* (Amberley Publishing, 2018).

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is

in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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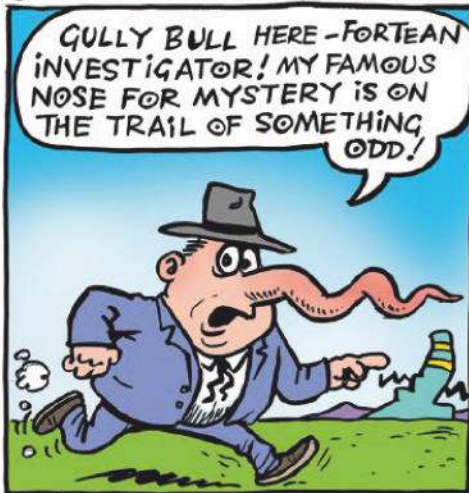
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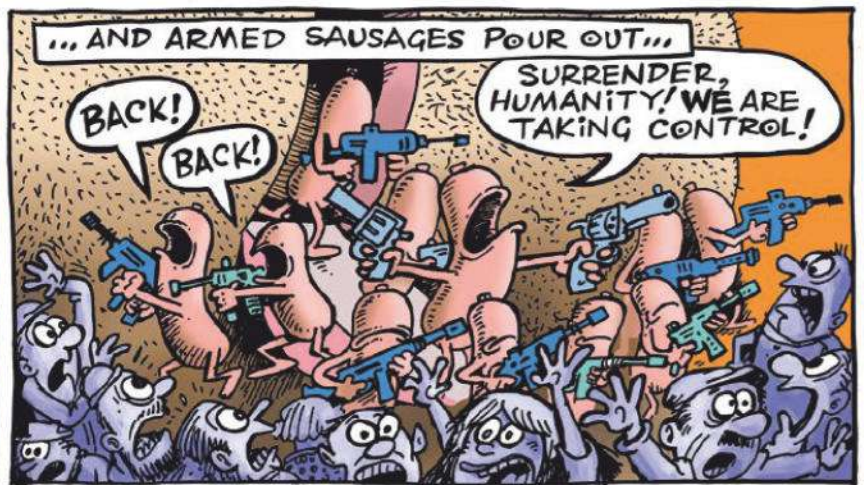
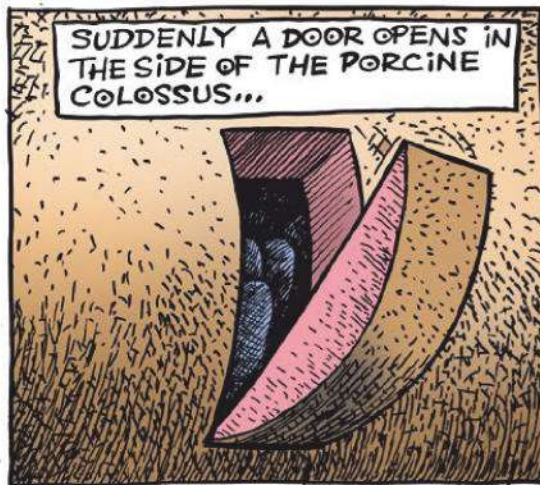
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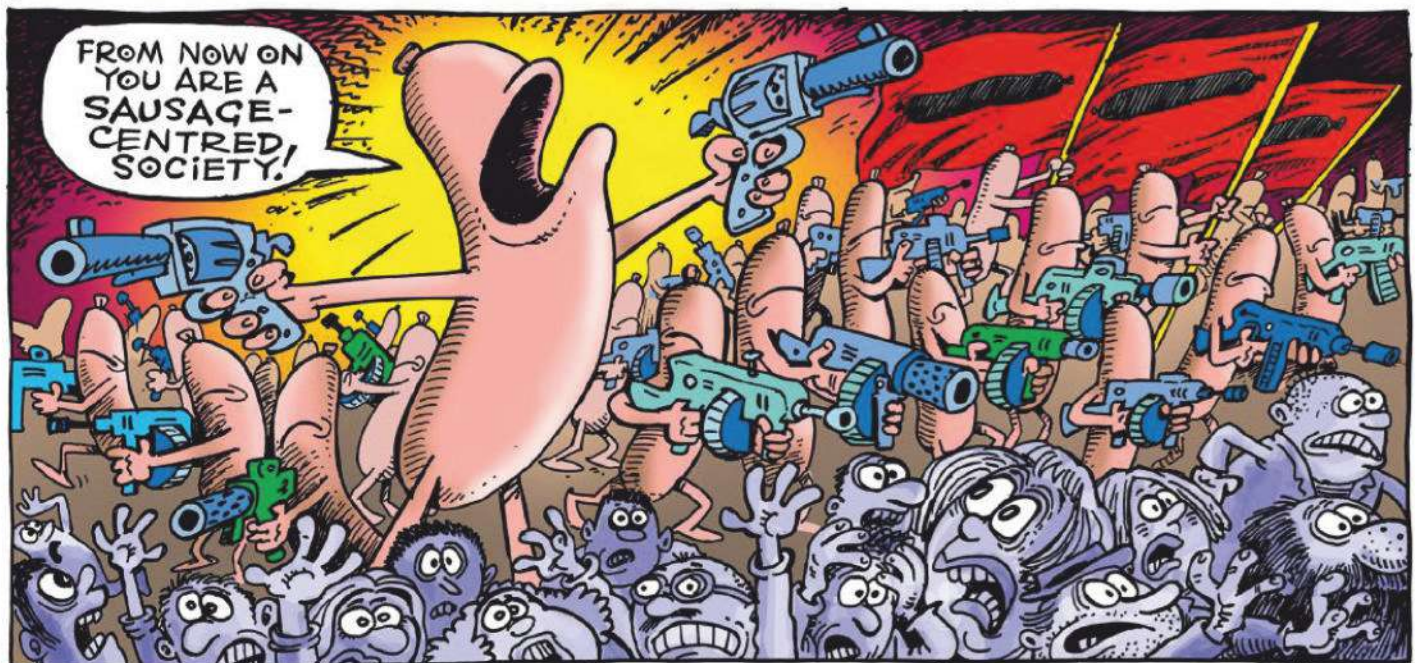


BUT HOW IS IT A THREAT TO HUMANITY?



BACK! BACK!

SURRENDER, HUMANITY! WE ARE TAKING CONTROL!



COMING NEXT MONTH



POSTCARDS FROM FAIRYLAND

ENCHANTED IMAGES OF A
VANISHED WORLD



TWILIGHT OF THE GODLINGS

THE ORIGINS OF BRITAIN'S
SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

PAST LIVES,
CROW DANCES,
FORTEAN CHATBOT
AND MUCH MORE...

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STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

In New York, a 50-year-old woman, originally from the Congo, was found to be carrying a lithopædion, a calcified foetus, that was compressing her intestines and major blood vessels, preventing her absorbing nutrients. Lithopædia is an extremely rare condition, only ever recorded 290 times since 1582, and occurs after an ectopic pregnancy, in which the foetus grows outside the womb. Such pregnancies are not viable, so the foetus dies and, as it is not in the womb, cannot be expelled from the body. If it is too large to be reabsorbed, the immune system gradually calcifies the foetus, turning it to stone. Sometimes, the calcified foetus causes the carrier severe problems, but they can also go undetected for decades. In this case, the woman had visited doctors complaining of stomach cramps, indigestion and a gurgling sound after eating. Scans revealed the lithopædion, which was determined to have resulted from a failed pregnancy nine years previously. The woman had visited a doctor in Tanzania, where she was living at the time, after realising the baby was not moving; they sent her home telling her to return in two weeks if it did not pass naturally, but when she did she was met by a crowd that accused her of "evil work" and "killing the baby". As a result, she rushed home and prayed, then decided to go without medical help. Once in New York, the scans revealed that the dead foetus had calcified, forming a six by eight inch (15 by 20cm) mass that doctors offered to remove surgically. However, the woman refused, saying that the condition was the result of a curse, adding, "I will let you know when I am ready; I am not scared of death." She died from malnutrition caused by the obstruction 14 months later without consenting to surgery. *dailymail.co.uk*, 10 Mar 2023.

Champion rower Waldonilton de Andrade Reis was leading a group of cyclists while out training near the beach of Ponta Negra, in Manaus, Brazil, when a bee flew into his mouth and stung him. Reis immediately collapsed with a massive allergic reaction, but because of his remote location it took 20 minutes for emergency services to reach him, leaving him fighting for breath. A local fireman managed to revive Reis by the time an ambulance arrived, and he was rushed to intensive care, but after

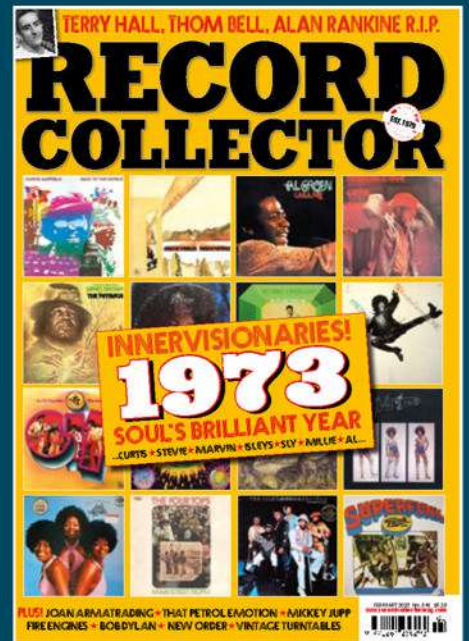
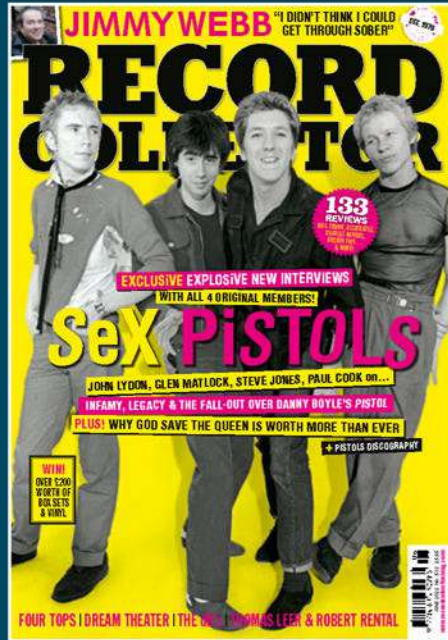
spending 21 days on life support he was declared brain dead due to oxygen starvation. Also falling foul of feisty Brazilian bees were Luciana Costa Dias, 47, and her husband Jose Ferreira Filho, 54. As they were leaving their home in Mato Grosso de Sul, a swarm of bees flew in through the partly open window of their Fiat Uno and stung the couple multiple times, causing Jose to lose control and crash the car. The couple fled the vehicle, but Luciana died later in hospital from an allergic reaction to the stings. *mirror.co.uk*, 31 Mar 2023; *Sun*, 28 Dec 2022.

Elsewhere in Brazil, in Uberaba, Kamilly Pricilla Fernandes de Olivera, 20, died of head injuries following the birth of her child by C-section. While she was being rushed to hospital to give birth, a heart monitor in the ambulance fell on her head, causing the fatal injuries. *metro*, 18 Jan 2023.

A Florida resident died from a rare infection of the "brain-eating amoeba" *Naegleria fowleri* which thrives in warm fresh water and soils throughout the US. In a statement on the case, the Florida Department of Health said that infection with the amoeba "can only happen when water contaminated with amoebæ enters the body through the nose", and that the Department of Health believed that the infection possibly resulted from "sinus rinse practices utilising tap water." It is thought that the victim had been in the habit of rinsing his sinuses out using a neti pot, a device that enables water to be poured up the nose, but instead of using distilled or cooled boiled water for the procedure had just used regular tap water. As this is not sterile, it can contain low levels of microorganisms such as amoebæ, and while such water is safe to drink because the organisms are killed by stomach acid, they can cause infections when water gets up the nose. Usually, people get infected when swimming, and symptoms of infection start with severe headaches, fever, nausea and vomiting, but can progress to a stiff neck, seizures, hallucinations, and coma if not treated promptly. Untreated infections usually prove fatal, and according to the US Centre for Disease Control from 1962 to 2021, only four out of 154 people in the United States infected with the brain-eating amoeba survived. *cnn.com*, 2 Mar 2023.



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